

ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS
CENTENARY EDITION
IN TEN VOLUMES
VOLUME IV



Robert Browning

(aged 67)

reading "The Ring and the Book" at Newnham Castle, September 17, 1868

From a drawing by the Earl of Portliffe

in the possession of "Hutchinson, Edith Browning, de Medici"

THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
SIR F. G. KENYON, K.C.B., D.LITT.

VOLUME IV—CHRISTMAS-EVE
AND EASTER-DAY—MEN AND
WOMEN—IN A BALCONY—
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

AFTER Browning's marriage on September 12, 1846, and his consequent departure to Italy, no visible sign of poetical activity appeared for three years. In 1849 a collected edition of his poems was published by Messrs. Chapman & Hall in two volumes, containing *Paracelsus* and *Bells and Pomegranates*, the shorter poems (Parts III and VII of the original series) being grouped together at the end, though without change of order, under the common title of *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. *Pauline* and *Sordello* were omitted. This edition contained nothing new, but the text of the poems was considerably revised, and brought practically into the form in which they are now familiar. In the winter of 1849-50, however, when the Brownings were living in Florence, Browning was occupied with a new poem, or rather a companion pair of poems. The first allusion to it is in a letter from Mrs. Browning to Miss Mitford on January 9, 1850 (*Letters of E. B. Browning*, i. 432); and by the end of March it had been published (*ib.*, p. 441). It was received most favourably in the

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Examiner, less so in the *Athenæum*, and 200 copies were sold in the first fortnight (*ib.*, p. 447). Nevertheless, it cannot be said to have led to any adequate appreciation in England of Browning's rank as a poet, and when the Laureateship became vacant a few weeks later by the death of Wordsworth (on the anniversary of the death of Shakespeare, April 23), no one seems to have thought of him as a possible rival to Tennyson for the succession. In America, however, he was paid the compliment of piracy (beginning with a reprint of the edition of 1849), and the foundations were laid of the warm appreciation which he eventually received, earlier than in his own country, on the other side of the Atlantic.

Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day has nothing Italian about it, and bears no trace of its Italian origin : for the description of St. Peter's no more needed local knowledge than the description of the German professor's lecture-room. Such local colour as appears is essentially English, in the wonderfully vivid description of the little Dissenting chapel and its squalid surroundings ; but this also is not drawn from any particular locality. Browning once expressly stated that all the incidents were imaginary, except the lunar rainbow, which he had actually seen. The poems take their origin from the particular phase of religious thought current in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, arising on the one hand out of the destructive criticism associated with the names of Baur, Strauss, and Renan, and

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on the other out of the Tractarian revival. This will inevitably militate against their permanent effectiveness; for each age has its own religious problems and difficulties, and those of a previous generation are apt to seem dead and cold. But as an expression of the religious thought of the day (and one of the functions of the poet is to be the spokesman of his generation) they will have a lasting value; and some of the descriptions in *Christmas-Eve*, in particular, are masterpieces of literature.

The original manuscript of the poem (some pages of which are in the hand of Mrs. Browning) is in the Forster Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington.

MEN AND WOMEN

Men and Women, as it has appeared in every edition of the poet's works since 1863, is but a fragment of the collection first issued under this title, in two volumes, in 1855. Then it consisted of fifty poems, with an epilogue,—the touching *One Word More* which dedicated the whole to his wife. The original collection and its arrangement were as follows :

Love Among the Ruins.

A Lovers' Quarrel.

Evelyn Hope.

Up at a Villa—Down in the
City.

A Woman's Last Word.

Fra Lippo Lippi.

A Toccata of Galuppi's.

By the Fireside.

Any Wife to Any Husband.

An Epistle containing the
strange medical experience
of Karshish, the Arab
physician.

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Mesmerism.	In Three Days.
A Serenade at the Villa.	In a Year.
My Star.	Old Pictures in Florence.
Instans Tyrannus.	In a Balcony.
A Pretty Woman.	Saul.
"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."	De Gustibus —
Respectability.	Women and Roses.
A Light Woman.	Protus.
The Statue and the Bust.	Holy-Cross Day.
Love in a Life.	The Guardian Angel.
Life in a Love.	Cleon.
How it strikes a Contempo- rary.	The Twins.
The Last Ride Together.	Popularity.
The Patriot.	The Heretic's Tragedy.
Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.	Two in the Campagna.
Bishop Blougram's Apology.	A Grammarian's Funeral.
Memorabilia.	One Way of Love.
Andrea del Sarto.	Another Way of Love.
Before.	"Transcendentalism": a poem in twelve books.
After.	Misconceptions.
	One Word more.

It is a collection to make the mouth water. In the *Men and Women* of 1855, Browning reached the summit of his genius; for readily as it may be admitted that some of the poems in *Dramatis Personæ* and some of the books of *The Ring and the Book* rank with the best of them, yet they do not surpass them. There are some twelve or fifteen masterpieces, with all Browning's characteristic excellences, and few or none of his characteristic defects; and the remaining poems form a worthy accompaniment to them. Almost all those to which a definite date of composition can be assigned belong to the years between 1850

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and 1855; they are the fruit of his marriage and of Italy.

Nevertheless the reception given to the two volumes in England was only lukewarm. They could not be charged with obscurity. The taint of *Sordello* was not on them. But it is probable that the circumstances were not favourable. Tennyson, with *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, had conquered the public taste, and for the moment there was no room for a second poet at the top of Parnassus. Then the nation was in the throes of the Crimean war. Sebastopol was taken in September, a month or two before the publication of the two volumes; but the excitement of the war and its accompanying political complications ran high, and gave poetry little chance of a hearing, unless, like *Maud*, it had in it an echo of the events of the day. Browning's long absence from England no doubt contributed something to the neglect of the British public; and the Italian setting of so many of the poems would be no help to popularity at a time when national feeling was highly strung. Accordingly it was left to a later generation to appreciate at their proper value such poems as *Andrea del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, the *Epistle of Karshish*, *By the Fireside*, *Any Wife to Any Husband*, *Love Among the Ruins*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, and their companions.

The original collection of *Men and Women* was never reprinted in the poet's lifetime, though of recent years it has been issued more than once

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in convenient forms. In the *Poetical Works* of 1863, the redistribution of all the shorter poems took place, which has been referred to in the introduction to the previous volume of the present edition. Thirty of the original *Men and Women* (reckoning *Before* and *After* as two poems, and including *Saul* in its extended form), were assigned to the heading of "Lyrics," twelve to that of "Romances," while *In a Balcony* was withdrawn to stand by itself, leaving only eight under the original title. To these were added *Artemis Prologuizes* and *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli* from the *Dramatic Lyrics* of 1842, and *Pictor Ignotus* and *The Tomb at St. Praxed's* from the *Dramatic Romances* of 1845, making a total of twelve in the edition of 1863. In 1868 *Johannes Agricola* was transferred from the section of "Romances," completing the total of thirteen poems of which *Men and Women* now consists. This arrangement has been adhered to in all subsequent collected editions of the poet's works.

"TRANSCENDENTALISM": A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS

In its present form, *Men and Women* opens with a commentary, under the guise of a dramatic monologue, on the nature of poetry. Browning has been charged with neglecting the graces of poetry in order to devote himself to the expression of thought; hence it is curious to find that on the principle underlying such criticism he is at

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one with his critics. He repudiates the mere expression of thought as the duty of the poet, and claims the graces and the ornamentation as his proper sphere. A poet must sing, not speak. That Browning does sing, and not merely speak, would be doubted by no one who read the original *Men and Women* with an open mind.

The genesis (though not the date) of the poem is referred to in a letter written by the poet to Prof. Dowden in 1866 (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, 2nd series, i. 17). In the original form of the poem, the German mystic, Jacob Boehme, was described as "Swedish Boehme"; and, on being challenged on the point, Browning wrote as follows :

"The first blunder you point out is enormous—only explicable to myself—and hardly that—from the circumstances under which I well remember having written the poem, *Transcendentalism*. I was three parts thro' it, when called to assist a servant to whom a strange accident, partly serious, partly ludicrous, had suddenly happened: and after a quarter of an hour's agitation, of a varied kind, I went back to my room and finished what I had begun. I have never touched the piece since, and really suppose that the putting "Swedish" for "German" or "Goerlitzist" is attributable just to that—for I knew something of Boehme, and his autobiography, and how he lived mainly and died in the Goerlitz where he was born."

John of Halberstadt, chosen as a contrast to Boehme, was a canon and a student of science, who was reputed to have discovered a stone

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which would make plants grow whenever and wherever he chose. Browning may have found a mention of him, as of the "Pied Piper," in N. Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World* (Hall Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 23); but Wanley merely says that "after having performed a number of prestigious feats almost incredible, he was transported by the devil into the likeness of a black horse; and was both heard and seen upon one and the same Christmas Day say Mass in Halberstadt, in Mentz, and in Cologne." This would not in itself account for Browning's reference to him here, which implies a fuller knowledge of him than Wanley can have afforded.

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

Another study of the nature of the poet, but this time from the outside, and relating more to external circumstances. There is nothing to show the date of its composition.

ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES

This is an experiment in imitation of Greek tragedy, — a prologue, or introductory scene, written in the manner of Euripides. The play to which it may be supposed to be the prologue would be a sequel to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, the substance of which is summarized in this speech of the goddess Artemis, Hippolytus' patroness. According to one form of the legend (narrated briefly by Virgil, *Aen.* vii. 765-777, and Ovid, *Metam.* xv. 530-546), Hippolytus, having

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been killed by Phaedra's treachery and Theseus' wrath, was brought back to life by Asclepius, but was transported by Artemis to Italy (where he fell in love with the nymph Aricia, from whom the place Aricia received its name), under the name of Virbius. What sort of drama Browning contemplated on this subject is not known. According to information given by him to Mrs. Orr (*Life*, p. 121), the first proof of the poem contained a note, stating that it was "nearly all I retained of a tragedy I composed, much against my endeavour, while in bed with a fever two years ago—it went further into the story of Hippolytus and Aricia ; but when I got well, putting thus much down at once, I soon forgot the remainder." No doubt, with returning health, he realized that he was better employed in writing original poetry in his own manner than in copying the manner of the ancients.

The poem was first published in Part III of *Bells and Pomegranates*, in 1842 ; and the above-quoted note fixes its composition to 1840. In the *Poems* of 1849 it was reprinted with the other "Dramatic Lyrics" of 1842 ; but in 1863 it was transferred to *Men and Women*, and the spelling "prologuizes" of the original publication was changed to "prologizes."

AN 'EPISTLE

The dramatic date of this poem is about A.D. 66, when the Roman army was gathering under Vespasian for the invasion of Palestine which

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began in the following year. It is difficult to reconcile this date with the age assigned to Lazarus in l. 119, since the miracle of his restoration to life must have happened about thirty-three years previously; unless indeed it is to be understood, from the lines which follow, that his actual age might be considerably greater than his apparent age, owing to the immunity from worry and anxiety gained by his spiritual experiences.

Of the actual date of composition there is no evidence; but it is safe to ascribe it to those early years of married life when Browning's powers were at their height,—the years which produced *Andrea del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, and *Blougram*, as well as this *Epistle*.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION

This poem takes us back from the period of the poet's maturity to that of his earliest promise. It appeared in Mr. Fox's *Monthly Repository*, together with its companion poem, *Porphyria's Lover*, in January 1836, and the two were reprinted, under the common title of "Madhouse Cells," in Part III of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842). In the collected *Poems* of 1849 they retained their juxtaposition and title, and in 1863 they were only separated by a few pages; but since 1868 they have been assigned to the distinct sections in which they now stand.

Johannes Agricola was a disciple of Luther in the early days of the Protestant Reformation, but subsequently became the founder of the sect of

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Antinomians, who (in the extremer forms of their doctrine) carried their repudiation of the necessity of good works to the extent of maintaining that even bad works could be done with impunity by those who were predestined to salvation. When the poem first appeared in magazine form, Browning prefixed to it a quotation from the *Dictionary of all Religions* (London, 1704) :

“Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the law as a thing of no use under the gospel dispensation : they say that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation ; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc., are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace, being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Pontanus, in his *Catalogue of Heresies*, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.” [The date actually given by Pontanus, *Catalogus praecipuorum . . . haereticorum*, Frankfort, *circa*. 1600, is 1538.]

PICTOR IGNOTUS

Originally printed in Part VII of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1845), and consequently not (as might otherwise be supposed) the fruit of Browning's life in Italy after his marriage. It is referred to twice, with brief words of admiration, in Miss Barrett's letters (*Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 253, 278). It is an imaginary portrait, and does not relate to any particular painter known to history.

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FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Unlike the preceding poem, *Fra Lippo Lippi* is unquestionably the fruit of Browning's residence in Florence, where alone he could have made acquaintance with the picture described in ll. 345-389, which hangs in the Accademia. The exact date of composition is not known, but it is on record that on the memorable evening of September 27, 1855, when Tennyson read his new poem, *Maud*, in the rooms then occupied by the Brownings in 13 Dorset Street, and was sketched in the act by Rossetti, Browning followed him by reading *Fra Lippo Lippi* to the select company there assembled.

The story of Filippo Lippi, as recorded by Vasari and other authorities, is substantially that indicated so dramatically by Browning. He was born probably about 1406 (the assigned dates vary between 1400 and 1412), lost his parents in infancy, and was placed by an aunt in a Carmelite convent. He worked for Cosmo de' Medici, who kept him under lock and key, until one night he broke out, after which Cosmo recognized the reasonableness of giving him more liberty. His principal work is in the Cathedral at Prato. Ultimately he ran away with a novice, Lucrezia Buti, who had been sitting to him; and their son was Filippino Lippi. After some years Pius II, at the instance of Cosmo, released them from their vows and sanctioned their marriage. He died at Spoleto, where he was working, in 1469, and was buried in the Duomo.

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The "youngster" referred to in l. 273 is Tommaso Guidi, better known by his nickname Masaccio, translated by Browning as "Hulking Tom." His frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel in the church of S. M. del Carmine at Florence are one of the great landmarks in the development of Italian art; but he is generally supposed to have been senior to Fra Lippo Lippi. Browning, however, when challenged on the point, adhered firmly to the other view, and maintained that Masaccio, whether older than Lippi or not, was at any rate his pupil (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, 2nd series, i. 18). The historical question, however, in no way affects either the dramatic power of this admirable poem, or its importance as a statement of a part of Browning's artistic creed.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

The origin of this poem was due to an inquiry from John Kenyon, the constant friend of both Robert and Elizabeth Browning, whether a copy could be procured for him of the picture in the Pitti Palace at Florence which represents the painter Andrea del Sarto and his wife Lucrezia. Fortunately for literature, this was before the days of the photographs of Anderson and Alinari, and no copy could be obtained; whereupon Browning wrote and sent in its place this beautiful poem, perhaps the finest of all his dramatic monologues, perhaps the single poem which one would select, if required, to represent him. The date of composition is probably 1854 or

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1855, and the poem was among those brought to England in the latter year for publication in *Men and Women*.

The poem is true, both dramatically and biographically, to the events of Andrea's life. He was born in 1486 and worked in Florence, where his technical facility earned him the title of "the faultless painter (*Andrea senza errori*)."

About 1517 he married Lucrezia del Fede, whose beautiful face appears in countless pictures by her husband in all the principal galleries in Europe. Andrea's own features are perhaps preserved in the well-known picture in the National Gallery, and certainly in that in the Pitti, referred to above. In 1518 he was invited to Paris by Francis I, but at his wife's earnest request he obtained leave to visit Italy, and having there spent the money which Francis had entrusted to him to buy pictures, he did not venture to return, as he had promised. He died of the plague at Florence in 1531. Browning's poem is true to all that is known of both husband and wife, and has fixed their character and reputation for ever.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH

This admirable delineation of the spirit of mediæval Italy was not the result of Browning's residence in the country, but of the second of his two previous visits, in the autumn of 1844. He then went to Rome, and there visited the

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the church of S. Prassede, and subsequently made it the stage for the poem which he contributed (with the title, *The Tomb in St. Praxed's*) to *Hood's Magazine* in March, 1845. It was reprinted in the autumn of the same year in Part VII of *Bells and Pomegranates*, and was ultimately attached to *Men and Women* in the rearrangement of 1863.

The poem has no basis of literal historical truth, and there is no tomb in S. Prassede which corresponds to the description; but it is full of a deeper historical truth in its faithful representation of one at least of the aspects of the Renaissance in Italy. Ruskin (*Modern Painters*, 1888, iv. 380) says emphatically of it: "I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin"; though he is wrong in attributing the poet's success to the fact that he had lived much in Italy.

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

This study in what may perhaps be best described as dialectical faith is admittedly a free portrait of Cardinal Wiseman, bishop of Melipotamus in *partibus infidelium* from 1840, archbishop of Westminster from 1850 to 1865 and head of the English Roman Catholic party. His theological tendencies were believed to be of a very "broad" or "liberal" character. Writing

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to Dr. Furnivall in 1881, Browning said : "The most curious notice I ever had was from Cardinal Wiseman on Blougram—*i.e.* himself. It was in the *Rambler*, a Catholic journal of those days, and certified to be his by Father Prout, who said nobody else would have dared put it in" (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, i. 68). There is no evidence to fix its precise date, but it may be observed that both Pugin, the architect, and Count d'Orsay (the former of whom, at least, is spoken of as living) died in 1852. On the other hand, the reference to "this war" in l. 938 would appear to point to 1854-55 at least for the date of the revision of the poem.

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Cleon the poet and Protus, the prince to whom he writes, are alike imaginary. The poem is a sort of pendant to the *Epistle of Karshish*, being a dramatic contrast, put into the mouth of a highly cultured Greek man of letters, between the spiritual exhaustion of Hellenism in the first century of our era and the Christianity of St. Paul, just as the other is a picture of the impression made by a glimpse of the central truth of Christianity on a trained man of science.

The poem (like *The Statue and the Bust*) was first issued in pamphlet form (for what reason is not recorded) by Moxon in 1855, shortly before its appearance in *Men and Women* (published by Chapman & Hall) in the autumn of the same year.

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RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

This poem takes us back to Part III of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842), where it first appeared, being coupled with *Cristina* under the common title of "Queen Worship." The story belongs to the Troubadour period, Rudel having been a French poet who fell in love with the Countess of Tripoli from the descriptions of her beauty brought back by Crusaders who had seen her. He wrote poems in her praise, and set out to travel to her, but fell ill on the way and barely lived to see her.

ONE WORD MORE

This epilogue to the original collection of *Men and Women*, addressed to the poet's wife, speaks for itself. The story that "Rafael wrote a century of sonnets" in a special volume appears to be a fancy of Browning's own invention, based perhaps on the fact that some sonnets by him are extant, written on the backs of drawings. The volume owned by Guido Reni (l. 27) was apparently a book of drawings, not of poems. On the other hand, the story of Dante, in stanza v, is authentic, being derived from the *Vita Nuova*, ch. xxxv. The unusual metre, devised by the poet in order to give a special individuality to his tribute of love, is trochaic in character, but has a rhythm very similar to that of Tennyson's experiment in hendecasyllabics.

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IN A BALCONY

This one-act piece was Browning's sole attempt at regular drama after the conclusion of the series of *Bells and Pomegranates*. It was written in the summer of 1853, during a three months' stay at Bagni di Lucca, and published in *Men and Women* in 1855. In this, its first appearance, it was divided into three parts, ending respectively at lines 339, 605, and 919. In the *Poetical Works* of 1863, when the foundation of the present arrangement was made by the reclassification of all the shorter poems (see above, p. x), *In a Balcony* was removed from *Men and Women*, and placed among the "Tragedies and other Plays" which occupied vol. ii. ; and in 1868 it received its present position, which chronologically is the most suitable, between *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ*.

It is not likely that Browning ever had much expectation of the little piece being performed on the stage ; but it was produced by the Browning Society on November 28, 1884, in London, the part of Constance being taken by Miss Alma Murray, the admirable actress who also had the leading parts in the revivals by the Browning Society of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* and *Colombe's Birthday*. It has also been performed in the present centenary year of 1912.

The exact position which was in the poet's mind at the conclusion of the drama has been the subject of some doubt, but the controversy is set

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at rest by his own words, quoted by Mrs. Bronson (*Cornhill Magazine*, 1902, p. 15). After Browning had read the piece to a party of friends in Venice, "one who sat near him said it was a natural sequence that the step of the guard should be heard coming to take Norbert to his doom, as, with a nature like the queen's, who had known only one hour of joy in her sterile life, vengeance swift and terrible would follow on the sudden destruction of her happiness. 'Now, I don't quite think that,' answered Browning, as if he were following out the play as a spectator: 'The queen had a large and passionate temperament, which had only once been touched and brought into intense life. She would have died, as by a knife in her heart. The guard would have come to carry away her dead body.'"

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Between the *Men and Women* of 1855 and the *Dramatis Personæ* of 1864 intervenes the great chasm in Browning's life, the death of his wife. After the publication of *Men and Women* Browning took up again the project, already mooted in 1846, of a revised version of *Sordello*, a hopeless task which was ultimately abandoned without result; while for relaxation he betook himself to drawing (*Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 228, 230). Other causes probably co-operated to restrict his production of poetry, notably the failing health

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of his wife, the education of his son, and the distraction of the political and military events of 1859. After this, however, there seems to have been a return of poetical activity, in which most of the poems printed in *Dramatis Personæ* were composed: for Mrs. Browning writes in March, 1861, that he "did much" poetry in the winter of 1859-60, though little since, and that he now has "the material for a volume," and would work at it in the summer (*ib.*, p. 435). But that summer was not destined for literary work, for on June 29, 1861, Mrs. Browning died.

As soon as possible after this crushing catastrophe, Browning left Florence, never to return; indeed it was seventeen years before he revisited Italy, and then his visits were confined to Venetia. From the autumn of 1861 his home was fixed in London. For some time, however, he can have had little time, even if he had the inclination, for original composition. His wife's "Last Poems" had to be seen through the press and published in 1862. In 1863 her papers on "The Greek Christian Poets" and "The English Poets" were republished in book form; and in the same year his own *Poetical Works* were issued in three volumes, with the complete rearrangement of the shorter poems to which reference has been made repeatedly in previous pages. Then, in 1864, the volume entitled *Dramatis Personæ* was published.

In its original form it contained eighteen poems, to which the lines entitled *Deaf and Dumb* and *Eurydice to Orpheus* were added in 1868; and

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among them are several which rank with the best of *Men and Women*. *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler* would be included in any selection of Browning's best poems, however small. *Caliban upon Setebos*, *A Death in the Desert*, and *Mr. Sludge the Medium* are among his most characteristic works, though in descending degrees of successful accomplishment; while *Prospice*, *Confessions*, *The Worst of It*, *Too Late*, rank very high among his shorter poems. Most of them are to be assigned to the great flowering time of the Italian period.

Browning's personal presence in London probably co-operated with the intrinsic merit of the poetry to give *Dramatis Personæ* a greater measure of popular success than *Men and Women*; for the volume, though published at the comparatively high price of seven shillings, went into a second edition in the same year. The total result of the publication of the collected edition of his previous work in 1863, of a volume of selections issued in the same year under the editorship of John Forster and B. W. Procter ("Barry Cornwall," to whom *Colombe's Birthday* had been dedicated in 1844), and of this new volume in 1864, was to bring Browning fairly before the reading public of England, and to win the allegiance of many among the younger generation, who approached him with fresh, unprejudiced minds, and made his acquaintance directly through his best work. Honours came to him from the University of Oxford, and were offered by that of St. Andrews. The concrete consequences of this growth in

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popularity was seen when publishers began to compete for the right of issuing his next poem.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

In the original edition of *Dramatis Personæ*, this group of lyrics was entitled *James Lee*. The title was changed in 1868, at which time the second and third stanzas of section viii. were added. The first six stanzas of section vi. belong to Browning's earlier work, for they were published, over the signature "Z," in the *Monthly Repository* for May, 1836. The rest of the poem appears to have been written in 1863, at the little village of Ste. Marie in Brittany, the scenery of which is described in section iii., and referred to in the four sections which follow. The impression conveyed by these corresponds with the description given in a letter to Miss Blagden (Mrs. Orr, *Life*, 1908, p. 256): "I feel out of the very earth sometimes as I sit here at the window; with the little church, a field, a few houses, and the sea. . . . Such a soft sea, and such a mournful wind." It was probably the "mournful wind" which recalled to his memory the opening lines of the old *Monthly Repository* poem, and led to its incorporation, with some alterations, in the new work.

GOLD HAIR : A STORY OF PORNIC

Pornic is another little Breton village, near Ste. Marie, where Browning, with his sister and

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son, spent the summers of 1863, 1864, and 1865. *Gold Hair* is possibly the "poem of 120 lines," which he speaks of having written on August 17, 1863, in the letter to Miss Blagden quoted above : for in its original form the poem lacked three of its stanzas (21-23 in the present numbering), and may have been even shorter in the first draft. Contrary to Browning's almost invariable practice it appeared first in a magazine, being printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* for May 1864 ; the exception may have been made in recognition of the greater appreciativeness of his poetry shown in America than in England. At the same time (perhaps to preserve the English copyright), the poem was printed by itself, in pamphlet form, by Messrs. Clowes & Sons ; but this does not seem to have been put into public circulation. The three additional stanzas, above referred to, were the result of a criticism by George Eliot, who observed that the motive was not made clear at the point where the money is discovered. Browning thereupon carried off her copy of *Dramatis Personæ*, and inserted in it these three stanzas, which made their first public appearance in the second edition of the volume (Nicoll and Wise, *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, 1895, p. 377). The story of the poem is true. The repairs to the church, during which the body with the gold was discovered, took place in 1782. The church can no longer be seen ; for Browning himself records its demolition, in order to give place to a new one, in 1865 (Mrs. Orr, *Life*, 1908, p. 262).

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The "Essays-and-Reviews' debate" began with the publication of that volume in 1860; and the publication of Bishop Colenso's views on Biblical criticism began in 1862.

THE WORST OF IT : DÎS ALITER VISUM : TOO LATE

These three poems, together with *Youth and Art*, are variations on a single theme. Each represents a pair of lovers, whom fortune has, in different manners, played false. In each a relation which might have been normal and happy has been perverted, either into actual tragedy and ruin, as in *The Worst of It*, or into a failure to attain the best of which the persons concerned were capable. The two first are also notable for their metrical experiments in the use of internal rhymes. In *The Worst of It*, which is on a higher plane than the others, the experiment may be regarded as successful; it seems to intensify, even by its monotony of recurrent sound, the hopeless tragedy of the situation. In *Dîs aliter visum*, on the other hand, it degenerates into a jingle, which is only justifiable if it be regarded as striking the key of cynical defiance in which the poem is set.

There is nothing to show the date of any of the poems, but they probably belong to the later years of the Italian period.

ABT VOGLER

Georg Joseph Vogler, the master of Weber and Meyerbeer, was one of the best known,

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though not the greatest, musicians of the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. He was born at Würzburg in 1749, and was a brilliant musician from his youth. He was Kapellmeister at Mannheim, Stockholm, and Darmstadt at different periods of his life, but between these times of settled engagement he travelled over the greater part of Europe, visiting in turn Italy, Bavaria, France, England, Russia, Holland, Portugal, and even North Africa and India. The organ was his principal instrument, and he made considerable contributions to the art of organ-building, especially in the direction of simplifying the arrangement of the stops. The "instrument of his own invention" was the orchestration, or portable organ, which he devised while at Stockholm. It was about three feet square, and contained about 900 pipes. His organs are said to have been very effective when played by himself, but other organists found difficulty in adapting themselves to them. They had, however, a lasting effect on the science of organ-construction. With regard to his skill as a musician, some words of his pupil, Carl Maria von Weber, are a striking commentary on Browning's poem : "Never did Vogler in his extemporisation drink more deeply at the source of all beauty than when, before his three dear boys, as he liked to call us [Weber, Meyerbeer, and Gänsbacher], he drew from the organ angelic voices and words of thunder." He died at Darmstadt in 1814. The title "Abt," or Abbé, is purely honorary ;

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for though Vogler was ordained priest in 1773, his occupation was musical throughout.

The above sketch is taken mainly from an article by Miss H. Ormerod in the *Browning Society's Papers*, part x. 1888-9, p. 221; see also Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. For the purposes of Browning's poems, any other musician would have served as well; for even the fact that the speaker is said to be improvising on a musical instrument of his own invention is not essential. It is with the exposition of the nature and power of music, as an element in the highest emotional life, that the poem is concerned; and in beauty, as well as in a happy use of technical knowledge, it is one of the most completely satisfactory of Browning's lyrics. That Browning himself was an ardent lover of music is matter of common knowledge; and while he lived in London he was a constant attendant at all important concerts, until the death, in 1877, of Miss Egerton-Smith, deprived him of his usual companion on such occasions.

RABBI BEN EZRA

Rabbi Ben Ezra, in whose mouth Browning puts two of his most impressive and elevated poems (that which bears his name, and stanzas xii-xx of *Holy-Cross Day*) was a Spanish Jew of the twelfth century (1092-1167), notable both as a theologian and as a student of science. Browning was fond of out-of-the-way scraps of Rabbinical learning, but although the thoughts expressed

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in the poem have some relation to Ibn Ezra's own opinions, their value as poetry is independent of any dramatic fitness. The poem (the precise date of which is unknown, but is probably 1859-60) is a direct and personal utterance to an extent greater than all except a few of his other writings; and it deservedly ranks among the best loved of his lyrics.

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

This probably also belongs to the later part of the Italian period; but no direct evidence of its date remains. With the exception of St. John himself, and Cerinthus, his great opponent, the characters named are imaginary; and the story of the manner of St. John's death rests upon no foundation of history or tradition. The doctrine of Cerinthus was not literally that Christ was mere man, but that Jesus was a mere man, on whom Christ, the Eternal Son, descended at his baptism, but left him before the Passion. He maintained, in fact, a dual personality, and in some respects was a forerunner of the Gnostic heresy.

CALIBAN UPON SÉTEBOS

It is not often (if we except the use made of Homer in subsequent Greek literature) that one poet takes up and develops a character invented by another, as Browning does in this poem with Shakespeare's Caliban. The motto prefixed to

INTRODUCTION

it (omitted by accident in the *Poetical Works* of 1868, but restored in 1889) indicates the use which he makes of it; it is anthropomorphic theology reduced to the lowest scale, and therefore with a marvellously vivid and convincing representation of humanity at a point barely removed from bestiality. The name of Setebos, which occurs in *The Tempest* (I. ii. 373) as that of the god of Caliban's dam, Sycorax, was derived by Shakespeare from the narration of Magellan's voyage through the straits which bear his name. Pigafetta, whose account of the voyage was translated by R. Eden in his *History of Travaile* (1577), and thereby became accessible to Shakespeare, records that the Patagonians worshipped Setebos, "that is to say, the great devil."

Of the precise date of the poem there is no record; but that it belongs to Browning's best period is evident from the poem itself. It is the masterpiece of the grotesque in poetry, of which Bagehot regarded Browning as the typical representative. It is only one of the styles which he has at command; but it is characteristic in the sense that no one but he could handle it with such admirable results. That the poem was one of his own favourites appears from his selection of it in 1885 to represent his dramatic poetry (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, 2nd series, ii. 17).

CONFESSIONS

A study in the extraction of romance out of common surroundings, the commonness being de-

INTRODUCTION

liberately emphasized in the whole setting and construction of the poem, while the romance is only allowed to break out in one or two vivid gleams. Mr. Birrell (*Obiter Dicta*, first series, p. 81) quotes it as "one of those poetical audacities none ever dared but the Danton of modern poetry; audacious in its familiar realism, in its total disregard of poetical environment, in its rugged abruptness: but supremely successful, and alive with emotion."

MAY AND DEATH

This poem was written on the occasion of the death, in May 1852, of Browning's cousin, James Silverthorne, son of his mother's sister, whose service in paying for the publication of *Pauline* has been mentioned in the introduction to that poem. There were three sons, who were neighbours of Browning during his young days at Camberwell, and for James (here addressed as "Charles") he had an enduring affection. When Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett were secretly married in Marylebone Church, James Silverthorne was one of the witnesses who signed the register, the other being Miss Barrett's maid, Elizabeth Wilson. The poem was first published in *The Keepsake* for 1857, and reprinted with slight alterations in *Dramatis Personæ*.

The plant referred to in the last two stanzas is said to be the Spotted Persicaria (*Polygonum Persicaria*), which presumably grew in the Dulwich woods where Browning and the Silverthornes

INTRODUCTION

used to play together. Its mention is a striking commentary on some words which he wrote to Miss Hawthorn in 1838 (Mrs. Orr's *Life*, 1908, p. 91): "How I remember the flowers—even grasses—of places I have seen! Some one flower or weed, I should say, that gets somehow connected with them."

DEAF AND DUMB

This poem formed no part of the original *Dramatis Personæ*, though it belongs to the same period. It was written in 1862, for a group of statuary by T. Woolner which was included in the International Exhibition of that year. The group represented the two deaf and dumb children of Sir T. Fairbairn. The lines first appeared in book form in the *Poetical Works* of 1868.

PROSPICE

One of Browning's rare contributions to periodical literature, having been printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1864, where it was probably not less appreciated because the American civil war was then at its height. The poem indeed appeared within a few weeks of the frightful carnage of the Wilderness and Cold Harbor. It was reprinted in *Dramatis Personæ* in the same year, and has since been generally recognized as one of the few poems where Browning's characteristic opinions are expressed in his own person.

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EURYDICE TO ORPHEUS

This, like *Deaf and Dumb*, did not appear in the original *Dramatis Personæ*. The lines were written for a picture by Leighton, and were printed (as prose!) in the catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition for 1864 (see Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, i. 71). They were reprinted in the volume of *Selections* published by Moxon in 1865 (with the title *Orpheus and Eurydice*), and included in *Dramatis Personæ* in the *Poetical Works* of 1868.

It is noteworthy that both the artists for whom Browning wrote poems to accompany their works had previously produced portraits of him,—Woolner a bronze medallion in 1856 and Leighton a pencil sketch in 1859.

YOUTH AND ART

This poem belongs in character to the group described above, which includes *The Worst of It*, *Dis aliter visum*, and *Too Late*, and was probably written at the same period. John Gibson the sculptor (1790–1866), who is referred to in l. 8, was well known to Browning in Rome, long before the exhibition of his famous “Tinted Venus” and other works in London at the International Exhibition of 1862.

A FACE : A LIKENESS

The “face” described in the first of these poems is that of Mrs. Coventry Patmore. the

INTRODUCTION

heroine of her husband's poem, *The Angel in the House*. Of the other poem the foundation is unknown.

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

The attitude of Browning towards spiritualism, expressed in this poem, arose from certain special circumstances of his life, which are prominent in his wife's correspondence. Spiritualistic phenomena, which were much in vogue in America in the winter of 1852, penetrated into Italy in the following spring, and for Mrs. Browning, who was "inclined to knock round at all the doors of the present world to try to get out," they had a great attraction, and for a considerable time they were a strong influence in her life. Browning, on the other hand, had an unconquerable scepticism as to the value of the phenomena, and an even stronger distaste for some of the practitioners concerned in their production. Prominent among these was the American "medium," Daniel Home or Hume; and it was a séance given by him in London in 1855 that produced the two letters (printed in Mr. P. Lubbock's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her Letters*, 1906, pp. 353-356) which express most characteristically the divergent views of husband and wife. Browning's statement of his own opinion is of interest in the present connection; for there is no doubt that Home was, in the main, the prototype of "Mr. Sludge":

"Mr. Browning did, in company with his wife,

INTRODUCTION

witness Mr. Hume's performances, . . . and he is hardly able to account for the fact that there can be another opinion than his own on the matter—that being that the whole display of 'hands,' 'spirit utterances,' etc., were a cheat and imposture . . . Mr. Browning has, however, abundant experience that the best and rarest of natures may begin by the proper mistrust of the more ordinary results of reasoning when employed in such investigations as these; go on to an abnegation of the regular tests of truth and rationality in favour of those particular experiments—and end in a voluntary prostration of the whole intelligence before what is assumed to transcend all intelligence. Once arrived at this point, no trick is too gross; absurdities are referred to 'low spirits,' falsehoods to 'personating spirits'—and the one terribly apparent spirit—the father of lies—has it all his own way. Mr. Browning had some difficulty in keeping from an offensive expression of his feelings at Mr. ——'s—he has since seen Mr. Hume and relieved himself."

The poem was probably written some years after this incident, when spiritualism had ceased to be so burning a question, and when even Mrs. Browning had lost much of her faith in its exponents. On the other hand, it is not likely that Browning would have taken it as the subject of a poem in the years immediately after her death: it is therefore probably to be assigned to the year 1859-60.

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APPARENT FAILURE

The chronology of the first stanza of this poem points to the year 1863 as the date of its composition. The baptism of the Prince Imperial and the Congress of Paris (at which Cavour tried to bring before the nations of Europe, assembled to end the Crimean War, the grievances of Italy) took place early in 1856. The Brownings were in Paris from October, 1855, to June, 1856. In spite of the threatened destruction, which prompted this poem, the Morgue still stands behind Notre Dame, at the east end of the Île de la Cité.

EPILOGUE

The Epilogue has no special relation to the poems composing *Dramatis Personæ*, unless as an expression of personal belief on certain matters of religious faith, appended to a number of poems, several of which deal dramatically with the views of various characters on the relations between man and God. Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, in virtue of which he stands as the representative of rationalistic criticism, was published in 1863.

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PORTRAIT

ROBERT BROWNING (AGED 57)

*Reading "The Ring and the Book" at Naworth Castle,
September 19th, 1869.*

*From a drawing by the Earl of Carlisle in the posses-
sion of Marchesa Edith Peruzzi de Medici . . .* FRONTISPIECE

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

1850

CHRISTMAS-EVE

I

OUT of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes full, I waited first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre 5
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter.
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch 10
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry 15
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Six feet long by three feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy ; the rain kept driving. 20
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
That congregation, still arriving,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Some of them by the main road, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging ; 25
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,
—They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard
border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder ;— 30
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again,—its priestliness 35
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did, 40
And meet the party thus presided,
“Mount Zion” with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,
And her wicked people made to mind him, 45
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind
him.

II

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock : the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report, 50
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones ; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
(Who humbly knew himself improper,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

But could not shrink up small enough) 55
—Round to the door, and in,—the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered 60
Little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place ;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry 65
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on :
Then, stooping down to take off her pattens, 70
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted, 75
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek ;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce. 80
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered, 85
I got the same interrogation—
“What, you the alien, you have ventured
“To take with us, the elect, your station ?
“A carer for none of it, a Gallio !”—
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance 90

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

At a common prey, in each countenance
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle 95
In the cracked square lantern I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal :
I verily fancied the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret, too !) for spite 100
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.
There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," thought I, as resolve grew stronger,
"This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor 105
"When the weather sends you a chance visitor ?
"You are the men, and wisdom shall die with
you,
"And none of the old Seven Churches vie with
you !
"But still, despite the pretty perfection
"To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness, 110
"And, taking God's word under wise protection,
"Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
"And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares,—
"Still, as I say, though you 've found salvation,
"If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares !'— 115
"See if the best of you bars me my ration !
"I prefer, if you please, for my expounder
"Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder;
"Mine 's the same right with your poorest and
sickliest
"Supposing I don the marriage vestiment : 120
"So, shut your mouth and open your Testa-
ment,
"And carve me my portion at your quickest !"

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a
rope, 125
(After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher)
—Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise, 130
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
—To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine, 135
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises, 140
And my neighbour's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure, 145
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling :
No sooner our friend had got an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible, 150
(Whene'er 't was the thought first struck him,
How death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in hell's grim drench)

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence, 155
As to hug the book of books to pieces :
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in sever-
ance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and
creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he 'd fain see
equipt yours,—
So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures. 160
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt :
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet 165
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or (who can tell ?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon :
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon 170
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure, 175
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing. 180
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'T was too provoking !
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it ;
So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it," 185
I flung out of the little chapel.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

IV

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too ; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison, 190
Block on block built up in the West,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew 195
What, any moment, might look through
A chance gap in that fortress massy :—
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy 200
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing. 205
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across ;
'T is ever dry walking there, on the moss—
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill.
I stooped under and soon felt better ; 210
My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
—How this outside was pure and different ! 215
The sermon, now—what a mingled weft
Of good and ill ! Were either less,
Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly ;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly, 220

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment !
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and
twined,

Till how could you know them, grown double
their size 225

In the natural fog of the good man's mind,
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
Haloed about with the common's damps ?
Truth remains true, the fault 's in the prover ;

The zeal was good, and the aspiration ; 230
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,

Pharaoh received no demonstration,
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it, 235
Apparently his hearers relished it

With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph ?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them !

These people have really felt, no doubt, 240
A something, the motion they style the Call of
them ;

And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)

A sort of reviving and reproducing, 245
More or less perfectly, (who can tell ?)

The mood itself, which strengthens by using ;
And how that happens, I understand well.

A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek 250

Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
—Finding no dormant musical sprout 255
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.
'T is the taught already that profits by teaching ;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's
office, I :
Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on. 260
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

V

But wherefore be harsh on a single case ?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the self-same weary thing take place ? 265
The same endeavour to make you believe,
And with much the same effect, no more :
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing 270
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally :
And in this church my faith sprang first !
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst 275
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered his church-door, nature leading me)
—In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities, 280
I found God there, his visible power ;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the power, an equal evidence
That his love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod, 285
Were diviner than a loveless god

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.

You know what I mean : God 's all, man 's
nought :

But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away

290

As it were a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.

295

Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, his own word saith, to grieve him,
But able to glorify him too,

300

As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.

305

Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock :
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from his boundless continent,
Sees, in his power made evident,

310

Only excess by a million-fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, note : man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,

315

—Advancing in power by one degree ;

And why count steps through eternity ?
But love is the ever-springing fountain :
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water-head—
How can he multiply or reduce it ?

320

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

As easy create it, as cause it to cease ;

He may profit by it, or abuse it,

But 't is not a thing to bear increase

As power does : be love less or more 325

In the heart of man, he keeps it shut

Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.

So, gazing up, in my youth, at love

As seen through power, ever above 330

All modes which make it manifest,

My soul brought all to a single test—

That he, the Eternal First and Last,

Who, in his power, had so surpassed

All man conceives of what is might,— 335

Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,

—Would prove as infinitely good ;

Would never, (my soul understood,)

With power to work all love desires,

Bestow e'en less than man requires ; 340

That he who endlessly was teaching,

Above my spirit's utmost reaching,

What love can do in the leaf or stone,

(So that to master this alone,

This done in the stone or leaf for me, 345

I must go on learning endlessly)

Would never need that I, in turn,

Should point him out defect unheeded,

And show that God had yet to learn

What the meanest human creature needed, 350

—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,

Tracking his way through doubts and fears,

While the stupid earth on which I stay

Suffers no change, but passive adds

Its myriad years to myriads, 355

Though I, he gave it to, decay,

Seeing death come and choose about me,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And my dearest ones depart without me.
No: love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it, 360
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it.
And I shall behold thee, face to face,
O God, and in thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast thou ! 365
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimiate,
With this sky of thine, that I now walk under, 370
And glory in thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus ! Oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way ! And this is mine !

VI

For lo, what think you ? suddenly 375
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven 380
Deep in the West ; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady.
'T was a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect, 385
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed, 390

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next, 395
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier and flightier,— 400
Rapture dying along its verge.
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc ?

VII

This sight was shown me, there and then,— 405
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another if, in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name. 410
For me, I think I said, "Appear !
"Good were it to be ever here.
"If thou wilt, let me build to thee
"Service-tabernacles three,
"Where, forever in thy presence, 415
"In ecstatic acquiescence,
"Far alike from thriftless learning
"And ignorance's undiscerning,
"I may worship and remain !"
Thus at the show above me, gazing 420
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under
Until at length it burst asunder

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And out of it bodily there streamed, 425
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII

All at once I looked up with terror. 430
He was there.
He himself with his human air.
On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I. 435
I forgot all about the sky.
No face : only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise ; 440
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound of the mighty fact.
“ I remember, he did say
“ Doubtless that, to this world's end,
“ Where two or three should meet and pray, 445
“ He would be in the midst, their friend ;
“ Certainly he was there with them ! ”
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw his very vesture's hem. 450
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear ;
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the vest,
“ But not so, Lord ! It cannot be 455
“ That thou, indeed, art leaving me—
“ Me, that have despised thy friends !
“ Did my heart make no amends ?

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“Thou art the love of God—above
“His power, didst hear me place his love, 460
“And that was leaving the world for thee.
“Therefore thou must not turn from me
“As I had chosen the other part !
“Folly and pride o’ercame my heart.
“Our best is bad, nor bears thy test ; 465
“Still, it should be our very best.
“I thought it best that thou, the spirit,
“Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
“And in beauty, as even we require it—
“Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth, 470
“I left but now, as scarcely fitted
“For thee : I knew not what I pitied.
“But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
“What is it to thee, who curest sinning ?
“Am I not weak as thou art strong ? 475
“I have looked to thee from the beginning,
“Straight up to thee through all the world
“Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
“To nothingness on either side :
“And since the time thou wast descried, 480
“Spite of the weak heart, so have I
“Lived ever, and so fain would die,
“Living and dying, thee before !
“But if thou leavest me——”

IX

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus. 485
When,—have mercy, Lord, on us !
The whole face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool,— 490

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discoloured web—
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift, 495
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion : 500
What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through 505
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals,—
“ So he said, so it befalls.
“ God who registers the cup
“ Of mere cold water, for his sake 510
“ To a disciple rendered up,
“ Disdains not his own thirst to slake
“ At the poorest love was ever offered :
“ And because my heart I proffered,
“ With true love trembling at the brim, 515
“ He suffers me to follow him
“ For ever, my own way,—dispensed
“ From seeking to be influenced
“ By all the less immediate ways
“ That earth, in worships manifold, 520
“ Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
“ The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold ! ”

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

X

And so we crossed the world and stopped.

For where am I, in city or plain,

Since I am 'ware of the world again ? 525

And what is this that rises propped

With pillars of prodigious girth ?

Is it really on the earth,

This miraculous Dome of God ?

Has the angel's measuring-rod 530

Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,

'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,

Meted it out,—and what he meted,

Have the sons of men completed ?

—Binding, ever as he bade, 535

Columns in the colonnade

With arms wide open to embrace

The entry of the human race

To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,

Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding, 540

With marble for brick, and stones of price

For garniture of the edifice ?

Now I see ; it is no dream ;

It stands there and it does not seem ;

For ever, in pictures, thus it looks, 545

And thus I have read of it in books

Often in England, leagues away,

And wondered how these fountains play,

Growing up eternally

Each to a musical water-tree, 550

Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,

Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,

To the granite lavers underneath.

Liar and dreamer in your teeth !

I, the sinner that speak to you, 555

Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Both this and more. For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all, 560
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive !
Men in the chancel, body and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs 565
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment 570
Blends with heaven's ; the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin ;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds ; the organ blatant 575
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when he praised him) ,
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling 580
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod, 585
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be 590
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

King of kings, Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
"I died, and live for evermore!"

595

XI

Yet I was left outside the door.
"Why sit I here on the threshold-stone
"Left till He return, alone
"Save for the garment's extreme fold
"Abandoned still to bless my hold?" 600
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years,— 605
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said—that he will go
And sit with these in turn, I know. 610
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping mine. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured, 615
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies :
And he, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark, 620
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze, 625
Because himself discerns all ways

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Open to reach him : I, a man
Able to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet, 630
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the founder's base :
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting his return outside. 635
—'T was thus my reason straight replied
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried—What has been abusing me 640
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift ?
Do these men praise him ? I will raise 645
My voice up to their point of praise !
I see the error ; but above
The scope of error, see the love.—
Oh, love of those first Christian days !
—Fanned so soon into a blaze, 650
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sat ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon : 655
You looked up and he was gone.
Gone, his glory of the pen !
—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric, 660
And exult with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet
Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter ! 665
—Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride 670
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, music too ! The air was stirred
By happy wings : Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away) 675
Would tarry not the wintry day,—
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till filthy saints rebuked the gust
With which they chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite 680
They glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chosen rather to set prayings 685
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new :
Love was the all-sufficient too ;
And seeing that, you see the rest :
As a babe can find its mother's breast 690
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now :
—Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled, 695
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already, 700
Not to speak of trying to climb.

I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover

So many species of one genus, 705
All with foreheads bearing *lover*

Written above the earnest eyes of them ;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,

In noble daring, steadfast duty, 710
The heroic in passion, or in action,—

Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.

What? with all Rome here, whence to levy 715
Such contributions to their appetite,

With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight

On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding 720
On the glories of their ancient reading,

On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—

And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them, 725

They offer up to God for a present ?
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—

And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed it,

I will rejoice that God had the preference. 730

XII

So I summed up my new resolves :
Too much love there can never be.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, a man who possesses both, 735
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
—Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist, 740
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can, 745
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at, 750
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must :
On the face alone he expends his devotion,
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it, 755
—Saying, “ Applaud me for this grand notion
“ Of what a face may be ! As for completing it
“ In breast and body and limbs, do that, you ! ”
All hail ! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue, 760
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger, 765
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best—
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure !

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

XIII

No sooner said than out in the night !
My heart beat lighter and more light : 770
And still, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed, 775
As it carried me after with its motion,
—What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake. 780

XIV

Alone ! I am left alone once more—
(Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple,—perhaps a college, 785
—Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall old quaint irregular town !
It may be . . . though which, I can't affirm . . .
any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany ; 790
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, Frankfort
Or Göttingen, I have to thank for 't ?
It may be Göttingen,—most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely 795
Glimpses of a lecture-hall ;
And not a bad assembly neither,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Ranged decent and symmetrical

On benches, waiting what 's to see there ;
Which, holding still by the vesture's hem, 800
I also resolve to see with them,

Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves his friends ;
As these folk do, I have a notion. 805

But hist—a buzzing and emotion !
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate

Because of his cranium's over-freight, 810
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran

A shoot of love from my heart to the man— 815
That sallow virgin-minded studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,

As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry) 820

And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
Those blue eyes had survived so much !

While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial. 825

Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence ;

And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent, 830

And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And giving his head of hair—a hake
Of undressed tow, for colour and quantity— 835
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own Young England adjusts a jaunty
tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
—The Professor's gravevoice, sweet though hoarse, 840
Broke into his Christmas-Eve discourse.

XV

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then, 845
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source ; 850
To do which, aimed this eve's discourse ;
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake, 855
From one or other bank, our thirst ?
So, he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable ;
Demanding from the evidence, 860
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class ?
Whether 't were best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together— 865

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

It matters little for the name,
So the idea be left the same.
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding 870
 How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
 Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
 Into this myth, this Individuum,— 875
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
 Of foreign matter, left, for residuum,
A Man !—a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour :
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient 880
 To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
 As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition,—which, though it
 meant
Something entirely different 885
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable :
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on 890
 The natural sovereignty of our race ?—
 Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him, 895
The vesture still within my hand.

XVI

I could interpret its command.
This time he would not bid me enter

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic 900
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
—One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic ;
—One, by his soul's too-much presuming 905
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapours of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
May poison it for healthy breathing— 910
But the Critic leaves no air to poison ;
Pumps out with ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
Thus much of Christ does he reject ?
And what retain ? His intellect ? 915
What is it I must reverence duly ?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that 's left) 920
Elsewhere by voices manifold ;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator. 925
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity :
But how does shifting blame, evade it ?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity ?
The stumbling-block, his speech—who laid it ?
How comes it that for one found able 930
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter ?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better ?
Strange goodness, which upon the score

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Of being goodness, the mere due 935
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God,—should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all— 940
From heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter,
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,— 945
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! They, you and I,
Are sheep of a good man! And why?
The goodness,—how did he acquire it? 950
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention, 955
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and whence flinch,—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing 960
As graced the alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital. 965
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known,—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration 970

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside, 975
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint :
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him 980
Whose insight makes all others dim :
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare : each shall take
His crown, I 'd say, for the world's sake— 985
Though some objected—" Had we seen
" The heart and head of each, what screen
" Was broken there to give them light,
" While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
" We should no more admire, perchance, 990
" That these found truth out at a glance,
" Than marvel how the bat discerns
" Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
" Led by a finer tact, a gift
" He boasts, which other birds must shift 995
" Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man,—
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God descended.
Ah friend, what gift of man's does not ? 1000
No nearer something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of nothings
Than one : take Euclid for your teacher :
Distinguish kinds : do crownings, clothings,
Make that creator which was creature ? 1005
Multiply gifts upon man's head,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And what, when all 's done, shall be said
But—the more gifted he, I ween !

That one 's made Christ, this other, Pilate,
And this might be all that has been,—

1010

So what is there to frown or smile at ?

What is left for us, save, in growth

Of soul, to rise up, far past both,

From the gift looking to the giver,

And from the cistern to the river,

1015

And from the finite to infinity,

And from man's dust to God's divinity ?

XVII

Take all in a word : the truth in God's breast

Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed ;

Though he is so bright and we so dim,

1020

We are made in his image to witness him :

And were no eye in us to tell,

Instructed by no inner sense,

The light of heaven from the dark of hell,

That light would want its evidence,—

1025

Though justice, good and truth were still

Divine, if, by some demon's will,

Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed

Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.

No mere exposition of morality

1030

Made or in part or in totality,

Should win you to give it worship, therefore :

And, if no better proof you will care for,

—Whom do you count the worst man upon earth ?

Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more

1035

Of what right is, than arrives at birth

In the best man's acts that we bow before :

This last knows better—true, but my fact is,

'T is one thing to know, and another to practise.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And thence I conclude that the real God-function 1040
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady,
"High-minded," hang your tablet-votive 1045
Outside the fane on a finger-post?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need we prove would avail no jot
To make him God, if God he were not? 1050
What is the point where himself lays stress?
Does the precept run "Believe in good,
"In justice, truth, now understood
"For the first time?"—or, "Believe in me,
"Who lived and died, yet essentially 1055
"Am Lord of Life?" Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love,—that man obtains
A new truth; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense 1060
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII

Can it be that he ~~stays inside?~~
Is the vesture left ~~me to commune~~ with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried? 1065
Oh, let me at lowest sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without throb for Christ's attributes,
As the lecturer makes his special boast! 1070
If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

One instinct rises and falls again,
 Restoring the equilibrium. 1075
 And how when the Critic had done his best,
 And the pearl of price, at reason's test,
 Lay dust and ashes levigable
 On the Professor's lecture-table,—
 When we looked for the inference and monition 1080
 That our faith, reduced to such condition,
 Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
 He bids us, when we least expect it,
 Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
 Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it, 1085
 Which fact pays damage done rewardingly,
 So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly !
 "Go home and venerate the myth
 "I thus have experimented with—
 "This man, continue to adore him 1090
 "Rather than all who went before him,
 "And all who ever followed after !"—
 Surely for this I may praise you, my brother !
 Will you take the praise in tears or laughter ?
 That's one point gained: can I compass another? 1095
 Unlearned love was safe from spurning—
 Can't we respect your loveless learning ?
 Let us at least give learning honour !
 What laurels had we showered upon her,
 Girding her loins up to perturb 1100
 Our theory of the Middle Verb ;
 Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar
 O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter ;
 Or curing the halt and maimed 'Iketides,'
 While we lounged on at our indebted ease : 1105
 Instead of which, a tricky demon
 Sets her at Titus or Philemon !
 When ignorance wags his ears of leather
 And hates God's word, 't is altogether ;

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Nor leaves he his congenial thistles 1110
To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.
—And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage,
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever),— 1115
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without plainest heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give the world up—
But still, when you rub brow meticulous, 1120
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
—God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you, 1125
“Christians,”—abhor the deist's pravity,—
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse, 1130
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX

So sat I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined 1135
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
“This tolerance is a genial mood!”
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
“One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf, 1140
“And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
“A value for religion's self,
“A carelessness about the sects of it.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

- " Let me enjoy my own conviction,
 " Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretful-
 ness, 1145
" Still spying there some dereliction
 " Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness !
" Better a mild indifferentism,
 " Teaching that both our faiths (though duller
" His shine through a dull spirit's prism) 1150
 " Originally had one colour !
" Better pursue a pilgrimage
 " Through ancient and through modern times
 " To many peoples, various climes.
" Where I may see saint, savage, sage 1155
" Fuse their respective creeds in one
" Before the general Father's throne !"

XX

- 'T was the horrible storm began afresh !
The black night caught me in his mesh,
Whirled me up, and flung me prone. 1160
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture !—
Swept forward from my stupid hand, 1165
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
 O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
Needs must there be one way, our chief 1170
Best way of worship : let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share !
This constitutes my earthly care :
God's is above it and distinct. 1175
For I, a man, with men am linked

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And not a brute with brutes ; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared : but should my best endeavour
To share it, fail—subsisteth ever 1180
God's care above, and I exult—
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May—doth, I will believe—bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify 1185
God's care for me—no more, can I—
It is but for myself I know ;
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me ;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow : 1190
Their races flourish or decay
—What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars divides the vault ?
But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's hebetude, 1195
She turns on my own life ! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence :
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book 1200
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read !
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid 1205
Into my soul ?—I cannot bid
The world admit he stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew he named my name : 1210
But what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again, "That man is dead" ?
Yes, but for me—my name called,—drawn 1215
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn :
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—
With a rapid finger circled round, 1220
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground
To fight from, where his foot was found ;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—
Summoned, a solitary man 1225
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van !
Soul of mine, hadst thou-caught and held
By the hem of the vesture !—

XXI

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled 1230
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung, 1235
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it ?
—Never flung out on the common at night, 1240
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor !

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

For the Vision, that was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist. 1245
There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place ;
Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall.
She had slid away a contemptuous space :
And the old fat woman, late so placable, 1250
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short, a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded, betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly, 1255
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such disgrace have happened ?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it ;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end ? 1260
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it ?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose :
Second, his gesture is too emphatic :
Thirdly, to waive what 's pedagogic, 1265
The subject-matter itself lacks logic :
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news ! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye 1270
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding !
Great news ! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I bury me,
Like Taylor's the immortal Jeremy ! 1275
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him ?
Ha ! Is God mocked, as he asks ?
Shall I take on me to change his tasks,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And dare, despatched to a river-head 1280
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which he sent,
And return with another thing instead ?—
Saying, “ Because the water found
“ Welling up from underground, 1285
“ Is mingled with the taints of earth,
“ While thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
“ And couldst, at wink or word, convulse
“ The world with the leap of a river-pulse,—
“ Therefore I turned from the oozeings muddy, 1290
“ And bring thee a chalice I found, instead :
“ See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy !
“ One would suppose that the marble bled.
“ What matters the water? A hope I have nursed :
“ The waterless cup will quench my thirst.” 1295
—Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift !
For the less or the more is all God’s gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink ? 1300
I then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God’s help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to his mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind, 1305
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,
The many motions of his spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven. 1310
For the preacher’s merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer ;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure? 1315

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Heaven soon sets right all other matters !—

Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,

This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort—can I doubt ?—
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.

1320

May it be mine ! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turned sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,

Of posturings and petticoatings,

1325

Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery !
Nor may the Professor forego its peace

At Göttingen presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,

1330

Prophesied of by that horrible husk—
When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial

Than a fable, myth or personification,—

1335

May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation !

Meantime, in the still recurring fear

Lest myself, at unawares, be found,

While attacking the choice of my neighbours
round,

1340

With none of my own made—I choose here !

The giving out of the hymn reclaims me ;

I have done : and if any blames me,

Thinking that merely to touch in brevity

The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—

1345

Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,

On the bounds of the holy and the awful,—

I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,

And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,

Who head and heart alike discernest,

1350

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Looking below light speech we utter,
When frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest !
May truth shine out, stand ever before us !
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield's Collec-
tion,
To conclude with the doxology.

1355

EASTER-DAY

I

How very hard it is to be
A Christian ! Hard for you and me,
—Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole, 5
A purpose of the human soul—
For that is always hard to do ;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realize it, more or less,
With even the moderate success 10
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
“ This aim is greater,” you will say,
“ And so more arduous every way.”
—But the importance of their fruits 15
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
“ Then, what if it be God’s intent
“ That labour to this one result
“ Should seem unduly difficult ? ” 20
Ah, that ’s a question in the dark—
And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this ;
We do not see it where it is,
At the beginning of the race : 25
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug ’s to come,—that ’s all.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

II

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
"Of difficulties, is belief. 30
"Could I believe once thoroughly,
"The rest were simple. What? Am I
"An idiot, do you think,—a beast?
"Prove to me, only that the least
"Command of God is God's indeed, 35
"And what injunction shall I need
"To pay obedience? Death so nigh,
"When time must end, eternity
"Begin,—and cannot I compute,
"Weigh loss and gain together, suit 40
"My actions to the balance drawn,
"And give my body to be sawn
"Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
"To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
"Like any martyr of the list? 45
"How gladly!—if I make acquist,
"Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,
"Of God's eternity of joy."

III

—And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns : for could you joint 50
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what 's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt—
Would spurn mere life : but when time brings 55
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

IV

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
"A touchstone for God's purposes, 60
"Even as ourselves conceive of them.
"Could he acquit us or condemn
"For holding what no hand can loose,
"Rejecting when we can't but choose?
"As well award the victor's wreath 65
"To whosoever should take breath
"Duly each minute while he lived—
"Grant heaven, because a man contrived
"To see its sunlight every day
"He walked forth on the public way. 70
"You must mix some uncertainty
"With faith, if you would have faith be.
"Why, what but faith, do we abhor
"And idolize each other for—
"Faith in our evil or our good, 75
"Which is or is not understood
"Aright by those we love or those
"We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
"Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
"When, turning from the ugly face, 80
"I found belief in it too hard;
"And she and I have our reward.
"—Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
"Weak beings, to go using thus
"A touchstone for our little ends, 85
"Trying with faith the foes and friends;
"—But God, bethink you! I would fain
"Conceive of the Creator's reign
"As based upon exacter laws
"Than creatures build by with applause. 90
"In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
"He doth)—he should geometrize.
"Whence, I desiderate . . ."

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

V

I see !

You would grow as a natural tree,
Stand as a rock, soar up like fire. 95
The world 's so perfect and entire,
Quite above faith, so right and fit !
Go there, walk up and down in it !
No. The creation travails, groans—
Contrive your music from its moans, 100
Without or let or hindrance, friend !
That 's an old story, and its end
As old—you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still, 105
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stand carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat,—
Beside, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before, 110
Now added, where was little need.
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sat still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech,
Of God's, writ down, no matter if 115
In cursive type or hieroglyph,—
Which one fact freed us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us,—am I right ? 120

VI

So, the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued
Further. You own, " 'T is well averred,
" A scientific faith 's absurd,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"—Frustrates the very end 't was meant 125
 "To serve. So, I would rest content
 "With a mere probability,
 "But, probable ; the chance must lie
 "Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
 "So long as there be just enough 130
 "To pin my faith to, though it hap
 "Only at points : from gap to gap
 "One hangs up a huge curtain so,
 "Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
 "Foldless and flat along the wall. 135
 "What care I if some interval
 "Of life less plainly may depend
 "On God ? I 'd hang there to the end ;
 "And thus I should not find it hard
 "To be a Christian and debarred 140
 "From trailing on the earth, till furled
 "Away by death.—Renounce the world !
 "Were that a mighty hardship ? Plan
 "A pleasant life, and straight some man
 "Beside you, with, if he thought fit, 145
 "Abundant means to compass it,
 "Shall turn deliberate aside
 "To try and live as, if you tried
 "You clearly might, yet most despise.
 "One friend of mine wears out his eyes, 150
 "Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
 "In patient hope that, ten years hence,
 " ' Somewhat completer,' he may say,
 " ' My list of *coleoptera* !'
 "While just the other who most laughs 155
 "At him, above all epitaphs
 "Aspires to have his tomb describe
 "Himself as sole among the tribe
 "Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
 "A Grignon with the Regent's crest. 160

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

" So that, subduing, as you want,
" Whatever stands predominant
" Among my earthly appetites
" For tastes and smells and sounds and sights,
" I shall be doing that alone, 165
" To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
" Which fifty people undertake
" To do, and gladly, for the sake
" Of giving a Semitic guess,
" Or playing pawns at blindfold chess." 170

VII

Good : and the next thing is,—look round
For evidence enough ! 'T is found,
No doubt : as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search : you 'll find
What you desire, and that 's to be 175
A Christian. What says history ?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses ! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable 180
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That faith might flap her wings and crow
From such an eminence ! Or, no—
The human heart 's best ; you prefer 185
Making that prove the minister
To truth ; you probe its wants and needs,
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly,—resolute
That faith plucks such substantial fruit 190
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
And puzzle out who Orpheus was,
Or Dionysus Zagrias,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

You 'll find sufficient, as I say, 195
To satisfy you either way ;
You wanted to believe ; your pains
Are crowned—you do : and what remains ?
“ Renounce the world ! ”—Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one 200
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it !—how soon past,
If once in the believing mood !
“ Such is man's usual gratitude,
“ Such thanks to God do we return, 205
“ For not exacting that we spurn
“ A single gift of life, forego
“ One real gain,—only taste them so
“ With gravity and temperance,
“ That those mild virtues may enhance 210
“ Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
“ Last spice of which, will be the fact
“ Of love discerned in every gift ;
“ While, when the scene of life shall shift,
“ And the gay heart be taught to ache, 215
“ As sorrows and privations take
“ The place of joy,—the thing that seems
“ Mere misery, under human schemes,
“ Becomes, regarded by the light
“ Of love, as very near, or quite 220
“ As good a gift as joy before.
“ So plain is it that, all the more
“ A dispensation 's merciful,
“ More pettishly we try and cull
“ Briers, thistles, from our private plot, 225
“ To mar God's ground where thorns are not!”

VIII

Do you say this, or I ?—Oh, you !
Then, what, my friend ?—(thus I pursue

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Our parley)—you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine 230
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black 235
Rather than see; all, nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested,—all took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best? 240
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed, 245
Apart from other sins,—concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate— 250
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Give licence formal and complete 255
To choose the fair and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again, .
Hard to mistake or overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for loss, 260
And bidding us reject the same :
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness,—come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

But I who thrill through every nerve 265
At thought of what deaf ears deserve—
How do you counsel in the case ?

IX

"I'd take, by all means, in your place,
"The safe side, since it so appears :
"Deny myself, a few brief years, 270
"The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
"Or cut the plant up by the root.
"Remember what a martyr said
"On the rude tablet overhead !
" 'I was born sickly, poor and mean, 275
" 'A slave : no misery could screen
" 'The holders of the pearl of price
" 'From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice
" 'I fought with beasts, and three times saw
" 'My children suffer by his law ; 280
" 'At last my own release was earned :
" 'I was some time in being burned,
" 'But at the close a Hand came through
" 'The fire above my head, and drew
" 'My soul to Christ, whom now I see. 285
" 'Sergius, a brother, writes for me
" 'This testimony on the wall—
" 'For me, I have forgot it all.'
"You say right ; this were not so hard !
"And since one nowise is debarred 290
"From this, why not escape some sins
"By such a method ?"

X

Then begins
To the old point revulsion new—
(For 't is just this I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake, 295

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Each friend we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect—
“There were my beetles to collect! 300
“My box—a trifle, I confess,
“But here I hold it, ne’ertheless!”
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though ’t were only hope,— 305
Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day 310
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we condemn,—
And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward 315
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
—Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it—make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved,—how hard it is 320
To be a Christian!

XI

“Proved, or not,
“Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
“You get of mine, for taking pains
“To make it hard to me. Who gains
“By that, I wonder? Here I live 325
“In trusting ease; and here you drive
“At causing me to lose what most
“Yourself would mourn for had you lost!”

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

XII

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave Saint Paul for Æschylus? 330
—Who made his Titan's arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo, death loured
Before them at the platter's edge! 335
If faith should be, as I allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavours with, or meant,
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals' place? 340
If, having dined, you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve 345
To utter—yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
E'er happened to our kind! I still 350
Stand in the cloud and, while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak perhaps;
Seeing that if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener, 355
My story, reason must aver
False after all—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray 360
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story !

XIV

I commence 365
By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light,
Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,
Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs 370
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day— 375
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
One could not well do otherwise. 380
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point ; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. One thing
Remained, however—one that tasked 385
My soul to answer ; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me
—Me there—not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain, 390

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
—The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
But my faith there, or none at all. 395
“How were my case, now, did I fall
“Dead here, this minute—should I lie
“Faithful or faithless?” Note that I
Inclined thus ever!—little prone
For instance, when I lay alone 400
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
As good authentic legends tell : 405
“He might : but how improbable !
“How little likely to deserve
“The pains and trial to the nerve
“Of thrusting head into the dark !”—
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark 410
Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,
Killed not in bed but on the floor, 415
And losing one night's sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin : but a friend 420
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass,—
Heartening, impartial too, it was,
Judge else : “For, soberly now,—who 425
“Should be a Christian if not you ?”

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

(Hear how he smoothed me down.) "One takes
"A whole life, sees what course it makes
"Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
"In spite of stoppage which imparts 430
"Fresh value to the general speed.
"A life, with none, would fly indeed :
"Your progressing is slower—right !
"We deal with progress and not flight.
"Through baffling senses passionate, 435
"Fancies as restless,—with a freight
"Of knowledge cumbersome enough
"To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
"Though meant for ballast in the hold,—
"I find, 'mid dangers manifold, 440
"The good bark answers to the helm
"Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
"Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
"Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
"Conceive a doubt, nor understand 445
"How senses hornier than his hand
"Should 'tice the Christian off his guard.
"More happy ! But shall we award
"Less honour to the hull which, dogged
"By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged, 450
"Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone
"And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
"Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
"And triumph o'er the breaking wave ?
"Make perfect your good ship as these, 455
"And what were her performances !"
I added—"Would the ship reach home !
"I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come—'
"The day when I shall see appear
"His bidding, as my duty, clear 460
"From doubt ! And it shall dawn, that day,
"Some future season ; Easter may

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“ Prove, not impossibly, the time—
“ Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
“ So aptly ! Easter-morn, to bring 465
“ The Judgment !—deeper in the spring
“ Than now, however, when there ’s snow
“ Capping the hills ; for earth must show
“ All signs of meaning to pursue
“ Her tasks as she was wont to do 470
“ —The skylark, taken by surprise
“ As we ourselves, shall recognize
“ Sudden the end. For suddenly
“ It comes ; the dreadfulness must be
“ In that ; all warrants the belief— 475
“ ‘ At night it cometh like a thief.’
“ I fancy why the trumpet blows ;
“ —Plainly, to wake one. From repose
“ We shall start up, at last awake
“ From life, that insane dream we take 480
“ For waking now, because it seems.
“ And as, when now we wake from dreams,
“ We laugh, while we recall them, ‘ Fool,
“ ‘ To let the chance slip, linger cool
“ ‘ When such adventure offered ! Just 485
“ ‘ A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
“ ‘ Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
“ ‘ And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab !’
“ So shall we marvel why we grudged
“ Our labour here, and idly judged 490
“ Of heaven, we might have gained, but lose !
“ Lose ? Talk of loss, and I refuse
“ To plead at all ! You speak no worse
“ Nor better than my ancient nurse
“ When she would tell me in my youth 495
“ I well deserved that shapes uncouth
“ Frighted and teased me in my sleep :
“ Why could I not in memory keep

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

" Her precept for the evil's cure ?
" ' Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure 500
" ' You 'll wake forthwith ! ' "

XV

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood 505
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment, 510
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) " There—
" Burn it ! " And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute 515
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire 520
As fanned to measure equable,—
Just so great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face 525
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew 530

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side
Caught past escape, the earth was lit ; 535
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed ;
Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled : whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound, 540
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top : a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in 545
And end the world.

XVI

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day : to retrocede
Was too late now. "In very deed,"
(I uttered to myself) "that Day !"
The intuition burned away 550
All darkness from my spirit too :
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made ;
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
And unevadable, the fact. 555
My brain held all the same compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office ; rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture. I
Lost not a second,—agony 560
Gave boldness : since my life had end
And my choice with it—best defend,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Applaud both ! I resolved to say,
"So was I framed by thee, such way
"I put to use thy senses here ! 565
"It was so beautiful, so near,
"Thy world,—what could I then but choose
"My part there ? Nor did I refuse
"To look above the transient boon
"Of time ; but it was hard so soon 570
"As in a short life, to give up
"Such beauty : I could put the cup
"Undrained of half its fulness, by ;
"But, to renounce it utterly,
"—That was too hard ! Nor did the cry 575
"Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
"Authentically deep and plain
"Enough to make my lips let go.
"But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
"Whether I was not, life's brief while, 580
"Endeavouring to reconcile
"Those lips (too tardily, alas !)
"To letting the dear remnant pass,
"One day,—some drops of earthly good
"Untasted ! Is it for this mood, 585
"That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
"Hast made its complement a hell ?"

XVII

A final belch of fire like blood
Overbroke all heaven in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky 590
Fire, and both, one brief ecstacy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a voice
Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
"Time ends, Eternity's begun, 595
"And thou art judged for evermore."

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

XVIII

I looked up ; all seemed as before ;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead
No trace was left : I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky 600
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life. 'T was the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite ;
When the armed angel, conscience-clear,
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear 605
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
"A dream—a waking dream at most !"
(I spoke out quick, that I might shake 610
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
"The world gone, yet the world is here ?
"Are not all things as they appear ?
"Is Judgment past for me alone ?
"—And where had place the great white throne? 615
"The rising of the quick and dead ?
"Where stood they, small and great ? Who read
"The sentence from the opened book ?"
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh ; 620
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently :
When, lo, again, the voice by me !

XIX

I saw . . . Oh brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands, 625
Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisa! laugh at fate !
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind 630
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise 635
The imaged vapour, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt
It vanish up again?—So hapt
My chance. He stood there. Like the smoke 640
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
I saw Him. One magnific pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His head, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet : night's black, that bathes 645
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within—
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,
That intense meditation fixed 650
On His procedure,—pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX

“ All is come to pass. 655
“ Such shows are over for each soul
“ They had respect to. In the roll
“ Of Judgment which convinced mankind
“ Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Terror must burn the truth into : 660
 "Their fate for them !—thou hadst to do
 "With absolute omnipotence,
 "Able its judgments to dispense
 "To the whole race, as every one
 "Were its sole object. Judgment done, 665
 "God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
 "To nothingness for thee. This world,
 "This finite life, thou hast preferred,
 "In disbelief of God's plain word,
 "To heaven and to infinity. 670
 "Here the probation was for thee,
 "To show thy soul the earthly mixed
 "With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
 "The earthly joys lay palpable,—
 "A taint, in each, distinct as well ; 675
 "The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
 "Above them, but as truly were
 "Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
 "Thy choice was earth : thou didst attest
 "'T was fitter spirit should subserve 680
 "The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
 "Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
 "No claim to their inheritance
 "Who chose the spirit's fugitive
 "Brief gleams, and yearned, 'This were to live 685
 "' Indeed, if rays, completely pure
 "' From flesh that dulls them, could endure,—
 "' Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
 "' Our earth, to show how cold and swart
 "' It lies beneath their fire, but stand 690
 "' As stars do, destined to expand,
 "' Prove veritable worlds, our home !'
 "Thou saidst,—' Let spirit star the dome
 "' Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
 "' No nook of earth,—I shall not seek 695

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“ ‘Its service further !’ Thou art shut
“ Out of the heaven of spirit ; glut
“ Thy sense upon the world : ’t is thine
“ For ever—take it ! ”

XXI

“ How ? Is mine,
“ The world ? ” (I cried, while my soul broke 700
Out in a transport.) “ Hast Thou spoke
“ Plainly in that ? Earth’s exquisite
“ Treasures of wonder and delight,
“ For me ? ”

XXII

The austere voice returned,—
“ So soon made happy ? Hadst thou learned 705
“ What God accounteth happiness,
“ Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
“ What hell may be his punishment
“ For those who doubt if God invent
“ Better than they. Let such men rest 710
“ Content with what they judged the best.
“ Let the unjust usurp at will :
“ The filthy shall be filthy still :
“ Miser, there waits the gold for thee !
“ Hater, indulge thine enmity ! 715
“ And thou, whose heaven self-ordained
“ Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,
“ Do it ! Take all the ancient show !
“ The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
“ And men apparently pursue 720
“ Their works, as they were wont to do,
“ While living in probation yet.
“ I promise not thou shalt forget
“ The past, now gone to its account ;
“ But leave thee with the old amount 725

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Of faculties, nor less nor more,
"Unvisited, as heretofore,
"By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
"So, once more, take thy world! Expend
"Eternity upon its shows, 730
"Flung thee as freely as one rose
"Out of a summer's opulence,
"Over the Eden-barrier whence
"Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

XXIII

I sat up. All was still again. 735
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. "But, all the world!"—I said.
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts 740
Of fern exist, to trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast 745
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! And this foot shall range
Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV

Then the voice, "Welcome so to rate 750
"The arras-folds that variegate
"The earth, God's antechamber, well!
"The wise, who waited there, could tell
"By these, what royalties in store
"Lay one step past the entrance-door. 755
"For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
"This life's munificence? For such

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“As thou,—a race, whereof scarce one
“Was able, in a million,
“To feel that any marvel lay 760
“In objects round his feet all day ;
“Scarce one, in many millions more,
“Willing, if able, to explore
“The secreter, minuter charm !
“—Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm 765
“Of power to cope with God’s intent,—
“Or scared if the south firmament
“With north-fire did its wings reflexed !
“All partial beauty was a pledge
“Of beauty in its plenitude : 770
“But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
“Retain it ! plenitude be theirs
“Who looked above !”

XXV

 Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
“What matter though my trust were gone 775
“From natural things? Henceforth my part
“Be less with nature than with art !
“For art supplants, gives mainly worth
“To nature ; ’t is man stamps the earth—
“And I will seek his impress, seek 780
“The statuary of the Greek,
“Italy’s painting—there my choice
“Shall fix !”

XXVI

 “Obtain it !” said the voice,
“—The one form with its single act,
“Which sculptors laboured to abstract, 785
“The one face, painters tried to draw,
“With its one look, from throngs they saw.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“ And that perfection in their soul,
“ These only hinted at? The whole,
“ They were but parts of? What each laid 790
“ His claim to glory on?—afraid
“ His fellow-men should give him rank
“ By mere tentatives which he shrank
“ Smitten at heart from, all the more,
“ That gazers pressed in to adore! 795
“ ‘ Shall I be judged by only these ? ’
“ If such his soul’s capacities,
“ Even while he trod the earth,—think, now,
“ What pomp in Buonarroti’s brow,
“ With its new palace-brain where dwells 800
“ Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
“ That crumbled with the transient clay !
“ What visions will his right hand’s sway
“ Still turn to forms, as still they burst
“ Upon him ? How will he quench thirst, 805
“ Titanically infantine,
“ Laid at the breast of the Divine ?
“ Does it confound thee,—this first page
“ Emblazoning man’s heritage?—
“ Can this alone absorb thy sight, 810
“ As pages were not infinite,—
“ Like the omnipotence which tasks
“ Itself to furnish all that asks
“ The soul it means to satiate ?
“ What was the world, the starry state 815
“ Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
“ Of power and beauty intermixed,
“ Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
“ What else than needful furniture
“ For life’s first stage? God’s work, be sure, 820
“ No more spreads wasted, than falls scant !
“ He filled, did not exceed, man’s want
“ Of beauty in this life. But through

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“ Life pierce,—and what has earth to do,
“ Its utmost beauty's appanage, 825
“ With the requirement of next stage ?
“ Did God pronounce earth ‘ very good ’ ?
“ Needs must it be, while understood
“ For man's preparatory state ;
“ Nought here to heighten nor abate ; 830
“ Transfer the same completeness here,
“ To serve a new state's use,—and drear
“ Deficiency gapes every side !
“ The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
“ See the enwrapping rocky niche, 835
“ Sufficient for the sleep in which
“ The lizard breathes for ages safe :
“ Split the mould—and as light would chafe
“ The creature's new world-widened sense,
“ Dazzled to death at evidence 840
“ Of all the sounds and sights that broke
“ Innumerable at the chisel's stroke,—
“ So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff
“ Was, neither more nor less, enough
“ To house man's soul, man's need fulfil. 845
“ Man reckoned it immeasurable ?
“ So thinks the lizard of his vault !
“ Could God be taken in default,
“ Short of contrivances, by you,—
“ Or reached, ere ready to pursue 850
“ His progress through eternity ?
“ That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
“ Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
“ To nothingness for ever ; so,
“ Has God abolished at a blow 855
“ This world, wherein his saints were pent,—
“ Who, though found grateful and content
“ With the provision there, as thou,
“ Yet knew he would not disallow

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

" Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,— 860
" Unsated,—not unsatable,
" As paradise gives proof. Deride
" Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside ! "

XXVII

I cried in anguish, " Mind, the mind,
" So miserably cast behind, 865
" To gain what had been wisely lost !
" Oh, let me strive to make the most
" Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped
" Of budding wings, else now equipped
" For voyage from summer isle to isle ! 870
" And though she needs must reconcile
" Ambition to the life on ground,
" Still, I can profit by late found
" But precious knowledge. Mind is best—
" I will seize mind, forego the rest, 875
" And try how far my tethered strength
" May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
" Let me, since I can fly no more,
" At least spin dervish-like about
" (Till giddy rapture almost doubt 880
" I fly) through circling sciences,
" Philosophies and histories !
" Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
" Fining to music, shall asperse
" Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain 885
" Intoxicate, half-break my chain !
" Not joyless, though more favoured feet
" Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
" The floor. At least earth's bond is broke ! "

XXVIII

Then, (sickening even while I spoke) 890
" Let me alone ! No answer, pray,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
 "All still is earth's,—to know, as much
 "As feel its truths, which if we touch
 "With sense, or apprehend in soul,
 "What matter? I have reached the goal— 895
 "'Whereeto does knowledge serve!' will burn
 "My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
 "I cannot look back now, nor stake
 "Bliss on the race, for running's sake. 900
 "The goal 's a ruin like the rest!—"
 "And so much worse thy latter quest,"
 (Added the voice) "that even on earth—
 "Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
 "Those intuitions, grasps of guess, 905
 "Which pull the more into the less,
 "Making the finite comprehend
 "Infinity,—the bard would spend
 "Such praise alone, upon his craft,
 "As, when wind-lyres obey the waft, 910
 "Goes to the craftsman who arranged
 "The seven strings, changed them and re-
 changed—
 "Knowing it was the South that harped.
 "He felt his song, in singing, warped;
 "Distinguished his and God's part: whence 915
 "A world of spirit as of sense
 "Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
 "Which he could traverse, not remain
 "A guest in:—else were permanent
 "Heaven on the earth its gleams were meant 920
 "To sting with hunger for full light,—
 "Made visible in verse, despite
 "The veiling weakness,—truth by means
 "Of fable, showing while it screens,—
 "Since highest truth, man e'er supplied, 925
 "Was ever fable on outside.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Such gleams made bright the earth an age ;
"Now the whole sun 's his heritage !
"Take up thy world, it is allowed,
"Thou who hast entered in the cloud !" 930

XXIX

Then I—"Behold, my spirit bleeds,
"Catches no more at broken reeds,—
"But lilies flower those reeds above :
"I let the world go, and take love !
"Love survives in me, albeit those 935
"I love be henceforth masks and shows,
"Not living men and women : still
"I mind how love repaired all ill,
"Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
"With parents, brothers, children, friends ! 940
"Some semblance of a woman yet,
"With eyes to help me to forget,
"Shall look on me ; and I will match
"Departed love with love, attach
"Old memories to new dreams, nor scorn 945
"The poorest of the grains of corn
"I save from shipwreck on this isle,
"Trusting its barrenness may smile
"With happy foodful green one day,
"More precious for the pains. I pray,— 950
"Leave to love, only !"

XXX

At the word,
The form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end— 955
I fell prone, letting Him expend

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

His wrath, while thus the inflicting voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
"Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!
"And all thou dost enumerate 960
"Of power and beauty in the world,
"The mightiness of love was curled
"Inextricably round about.
"Love lay within it and without,
"To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul 965
"Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
"Still set deliberate aside
"His love!—Now take love! Well betide
"Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
"The show of love for the name's sake, 970
"Remembering every moment Who,
"Beside creating thee unto
"These ends, and these for thee, was said
"To undergo death in thy stead
"In flesh like thine: so ran the tale. 975
"What doubt in thee could countervail
"Belief in it? Upon the ground
"That in the story had been found
"Too much love! How could God love so?'
"He who in all his works below, 980
"Adapted to the needs of man,
"Made love the basis of the plan,—
"Did love, as was demonstrated:
"While man, who was so fit instead
"To hate, as every day gave proof,— 985
"Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
"Both could and did invent that scheme
"Of perfect love: 't would well beseem
"Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
"Not tally with God's usual ways!" 990

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

XXXI

And I cowered deprecatingly—
“Thou Love of God ! Or let me die,
“Or grant what shall seem heaven almost !
“Let me not know that all is lost,
“Though lost it be—leave me not tied 995
“To this despair, this corpse-like bride !
“Let that old life seem mine—no more—
“With limitation as before,
“With darkness, hunger, toil, distress :
“Be all the earth a wilderness ! 1000
“Only let me go on, go on,
“Still hoping ever and anon
“To reach one eve the Better Land !”

XXXII

Then did the form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise 1005
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII

When I lived again,
The day was breaking,—the grey plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision ? False or true ? 1010
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—
The last day's watching : then the night,— 1015
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect 1020
My warfare ; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize. 1025
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows,—the fiend in angel's shape !
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard 1030
To be a Christian, as I said !
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, " How dreadful to be grudged 1035
" No ease henceforth, as one that 's judged,
" Condemned to earth for ever, shut
" From heaven ! "

But Easter-Day breaks ! But
Christ rises ! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say ? 1040

MEN AND WOMEN

MEN AND WOMEN

184-, 185-

“TRANSCENDENTALISM : A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS”

STOP playing, poet ! May a brother speak ?
'T is you speak, that 's your error. Song 's our art :
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
—True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to
treasure up !

But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast, at length,
Only to speak dry words across its strings ?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough :
Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears !
The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,
Which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp—
Exchange our harp for that,—who hinders you ?

But here 's your fault; grown men want thought,
you think ;
Thought 's what they mean by verse, and seek in
verse.
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.
Quite otherwise ! Objects throng our youth, 't is
true ;

MEN AND WOMEN

We see and hear and do not wonder much :
If you could tell us what they mean, indeed !
As German Boehme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak,
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.
That day the daisy had an eye indeed—
Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes !
We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.
But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote
(Collating and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind),
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts
about ?
He with a "look you !" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again !
You are a poem, though your poem 's naught.
The best of all you showed before, believe,
Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords
Bent, following the cherub at the top
That points to God with his paired half-moon
wings.

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

I ONLY knew one poet in my life :
And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black 5
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did :
The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the
threads,
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane, 10
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads nowhither ; now, they breathed them-
selves
On the main promenade just at the wrong time : 15
You 'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick 20
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys 25
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.

MEN AND WOMEN

He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognizance of men and things, 30
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw ;
If any cursed a woman, he took note ;
Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know you and expect as much. 35
So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew ! 40
We merely kept a governor for form,
While this man walked about and took account
Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
Who has an itch to know things, he knows why, 45
And reads them in his bedroom of a night.
Oh, you might smile ! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
As back into your mind the man's look came.
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow 50
His eyes had to live under !—clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate ?
When altogether old B. disappeared 55
And young C. got his mistress,—was 't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all ?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains ?
Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month ; 60
Our city gets new governors at whiles,—
But never word or sign, that I could hear,

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night. 65
Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!
"Too far above my people,—beneath me!
"I set the watch,—how should the people know?
"Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!" 70
Was some such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room 75
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge,
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise! 80
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you 're sure her name was) o'er the
cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears, 85
Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed
went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
Would point him out to me a dozen times;
"'St—'St," he'd whisper, "the Corregidor!" 90
I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,

MEN AND WOMEN

Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its
turn, 95
And memorized the miracle in vogue !
He had a great observance from us boys ;
We were in error ; that was not the man.

I 'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die, 100
And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and
death, 105
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat and up to knees in mud,
Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
And, now the day was won, relieved at once !
No further show or need for that old coat, 110
You are sure, for one thing ! Bless us, all the
while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I !
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse,—could you ?
Let 's to the Prado and make the most of time. 115

MEN AND WOMEN

The fame of him her swerving made not swerve. 30
And Theseus, read, returning, and believed,
And exiled, in the blindness of his wrath,
The man without a crime who, last as first,
Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.
Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained 35
That of his wishes should be granted three,
And one he imprecated straight—"Alive
"May ne'er Hippolutos reach other lands!"
Poseidon heard, ai ai! And scarce the prince
Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car 40
That give the feet a stay against the strength
Of the Henetian horses, and around
His body flung the rein, and urged their speed
Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,
When from the gaping wave a monster flung 45
His obscene body in the coursers' path.
These, mad with terror, as the sea-bull sprawled
Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him
That reared them; and the master-chariot-pole
Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed, 50
Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,
Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein
Which either hand directed; nor they quenched
The frenzy of their flight before each trace,
Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woeful car, 55
Each boulder-stone, sharp stub and spiny shell,
Huge fish-bone wrecked and wreathed amid the
sands
On that detested beach, was bright with blood
And morsels of his flesh: then fell the steeds
Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts, 60
Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.
His people, who had witnessed all afar,
Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.
But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced

ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES

(Indomitable as a man foredoomed) 65
That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,
I, in a flood of glory visible,
Stood o'er my dying votary and, deed
By deed, revealed, as all took place, the truth.
Then Theseus lay the woofullest of men, 70
And worthily ; but ere the death-veils hid
His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed
To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.

So I, who ne'er forsake my votaries,
Lest in the cross-way none the honey-cake 75
Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life ;
Lest at my fane the priests disconsolate
Should dress my image with some faded poor
Few crowns, made favours of, nor dare object
Such slackness to my worshippers who turn 80
Elsewhere the trusting heart and loaded hand,
As they had climbed Olumpos to report
Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne—
I interposed : and, this eventful night,—
(While round the funeral pyre the populace 85
Stood with fierce light on their black robes which
bound
Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they
clipped
O'er the dead body of their withered prince,
And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated
On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab 90
'T was bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief—
As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed
Sending a crowd of sparkles through the night,
And the gay fire, elate with mastery,
Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars 95
Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,
And splendid gums like gold),—my potency

MEN AND WOMEN

Conveyed the perished man to my retreat
In the thrice-venerable forest here.
And this white-bearded sage who squeezes now 100
The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,
Asclepios, whom my radiant brother taught
The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,
To know their secret'st virtue and express
The saving soul of all : who so has soothed 105
With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,
Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,
And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,
And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh
Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot 110
Of every tortured limb—that now he lies
As if mere sleep possessed him underneath
These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh cheer,
Divine presenter of the healing rod,
Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye, 115
Twines his lithe spires around! I say, much cheer!
Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies!
And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,
Ply, as the sage directs, these buds and leaves
That strew the turf around the twain! While I 120
Await, in fitting silence, the event.

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE
OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space 5
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain, 10
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home 15
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with
peace)
Three samples of true snakestone—rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time. 20

My journeyings were brought to Jericho :
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unrepaid ?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone

MEN AND WOMEN

On many a flinty furlong of this land. 25
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward :
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls : 30
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy ;
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night, 35
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest
here !
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip 40
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say ;
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of : there 's a spider here 45
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back ;
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows
his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to ?
His service payeth me a sublimate 50
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth 55
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease

AN EPISTLE

Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar— 60
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price—
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush, 65
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else
The Man had something in the look of him—
His case has struck me far more than 't is worth. 70
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth? 75
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all !

'T is but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point 80
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days :
When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 't were well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once 85
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall 90
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,

MEN AND WOMEN

(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls
The just-returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart 95
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
—That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe : 100
—'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.
"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment !—not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life, 105
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all !
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable, 110
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep ! 115
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all ?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke, 120
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed : and yet no fool.
And that 's a sample how his years must go. 125
Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure,—can he use the same

AN EPISTLE

With straitened habits and with tastes starved
small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things, 130
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—
Warily parsimonious, when no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times? 135
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one :
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty— 140
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven :
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much. 145
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
'T is one ! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt 150
With stupor at its very littleness,
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results ;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point) 155
That we too see not with his opened eyes.
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness, 160
Or pretermission of the daily craft !
While a word, gesture, glance from that same child

MEN AND WOMEN

At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand 165
The reason why—" 't is but a word," object—
"A gesture"—he regards thee as our lord,
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,
We both would unadvisedly recite 170
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both 175
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb 180
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here. 185
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not along, this blackthread through the blaze—
"It should be" baulked by "here it cannot be." 190
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within
Admonishes: then back he sinks at once 195
To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;

AN EPISTLE

And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows 200
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last 205
For that same death which must restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth :
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please. 210
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do : 215
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
His own conviction? Ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
"Be it as God please" reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should : 220
"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
"Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
"To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
"Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
He merely looked with his large eyes on me. 225
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognizes tools 230
In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb :
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—

MEN AND WOMEN

An indignation which is promptly curbed : 235
As when in certain travel I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land's practitioners,
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance, 240
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace !

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source, 245
Conferring with the frankness that befits ?
Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule 250
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone) 255
Was wrought by the mad people—that 's their wont !
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
How could he stop the earthquake ? That 's their
way !

The other imputations must be lies : 260
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect for any good man's fame.
(And after all, our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad ; should we count on what he says ?
Perhaps not : though in writing to a leech 265
'T is well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As—God forgive me ! who but God himself,

AN EPISTLE

Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile ! 270
—'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own
house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose re-
peat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact, 275
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith ?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark ?
I noticed on the margin of a pool 280
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange !

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth ! 285
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus : 290
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold and menacing :
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met 295
In this old sleepy town at unawaré,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good. 300
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends

MEN AND WOMEN

For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine ;
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell !

The very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too— 305
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, “ O heart I made, a heart beats here !
“ Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !
“ Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
“ But love I gave thee, with myself to love, 310
“ And thou must love me who have died for thee !”
The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION

THERE 's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof ;
No suns and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me ; splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof :
For I intend to get to God,
For 't is to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled ;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me his child ;
Ordained a life for me, arrayed
Its circumstances every one
To the minutest ; ay, God said
This head this hand should rest upon
Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless for ever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so :
But sure that thought and word and deed
All go to swell his love for me,
Me, made because that love had need

MEN AND WOMEN

Of something irreversibly
Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,
No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop !
I have God's warrant, could I blend
All hideous sins, as in a cup,
To drink the mingled venoms up ;
Secure my nature will convert
The draught to blossoming gladness fast :
While sweet dew turns to the gourd's hurt,
And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
By unexhausted power to bless,
I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
And those its waves of flame oppress,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness ;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
One altar-smoke, so pure !—to win
If not love like God's love for me,
At least to keep his anger in ;
And all their striving turned to sin.
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
The incense-swinging child,—undone
Before God fashioned star or sun !
God, whom I praise ; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand ?

PICTOR IGNOTUS

FLORENCE, 15—

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up ! No
bar

Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it
soothes !

—Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God : nor would my flesh have
shrunk

From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder,
sunk

To the centre, of an instant ; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The licence and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to truth made visible in man.

And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue ;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,

A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place ;
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—
O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup ?

What did ye give me that I have not saved ?

MEN AND WOMEN

Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well !)
Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth, t
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
Through old streets named afresh from the
event,
Till it reached home, where learned age should
greet

My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet !—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—
The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear !
But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
Have scared me, like the revels through a door
Of some strange house of idols at its rites !

This world seemed not the world it was before :
Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped
. . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun
To press on me and judge me ? Though I stooped
Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough !
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
And where they live needs must our pictures live
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of —“ This I love, or this I hate,
“ This likes me more, and this affects me less ! ”
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint

PICTOR IGNOTUS

These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—
At least no merchant traffics in my heart ;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand
apart :
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures ! surely, gently die !
O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its
worth ?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry ?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth ?

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what 's to blame? you think you see a
monk !

What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end 5
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
The Carmine 's my cloister : hunt it up,
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse, 10
Weke, weke, that 's crept to keep him company !
Aha, you know your betters ! Then, you 'll take
Your hand away that 's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I ?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend 15
Three streets off—he 's a certain . . . how d' ye
call ?

Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh ! you
were best !

Remember and tell me, the day you 're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe ! 20
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you :
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the
streets

And count fair prize what comes into their net ?
He 's Judas to a tittle, that man is ! 25

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Just such a face ! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I 'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads ! more beside !) 30
And all 's come square again. I 'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that
holds

John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand (" Look you, now," as who should
say) 35

And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !
It 's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !
Yes, I 'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down, 40
You know them and they take you ? like enough !
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.

Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here 's spring come, and the nights one makes
up bands 45

To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I 've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf ! I leaned out of window for fresh air. 50
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of
song,—

Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb !
Flower o' the quince, 55
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since ?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.

MEN AND WOMEN

Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—
three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh
and blood, 60
That 's all I 'm made of ! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder ! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so
dropped, 65
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,
If I 've been merry, what matter who knows ?
And so as I was stealing back again 70
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see ! 75
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your
head—
Mine 's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in
that !
If Master Cosimo announced himself, 80
Mum 's the word naturally ; but a monk !
Come, what am I a beast for ? tell us, now !
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day, 85
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge, 90
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words
there,
While I stood munching my first bread that
month :
“So, boy, you ’re minded,” quoth the good fat
father
Wiping his own mouth, ’t was refection-time,—
“To quit this very miserable world ? 95
“Will you renounce” . . . “the mouthful of
bread ?” thought I ;
By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of me ;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici 100
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
’T was not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside ! 105
“Let ’s see what the urchin ’s fit for”—that came
next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do ! They tried me with their books :
Lord, they ’d have taught me Latin in pure waste !
Flower o’ the clove, 110
All the Latin I construe is, “amo” I love !
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk’s faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires, 115
And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch

MEN AND WOMEN

The droppings of the wax to sell again, 120
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less 125
For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge, 130
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks
looked black. 135
“Nay,” quoth the Prior, “turn him out, d' ye say?
“In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
“What if at last we get our man of parts,
“We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
“And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine 140
“And put the front on it that ought to be!”
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls
a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white, 145
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there 150
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ 155
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at
eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf, 160
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
I painted all, then cried "'T is ask and have ;
"Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall. 165
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies,— "That 's the very man !
"Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog !
"That woman 's like the Prior's niece who comes 170
"To care about his asthma : it 's the life !"
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and fumed ;
Their betters took their turn to see and say :
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. "How ? what 's
here ? 175
"Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all !
"Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
"As much as pea and pea ! it 's devil's-game !
"Your business is not to catch men with show,
"With homage to the perishable clay, 180
"But lift them over it, ignore it all,
"Make them forget there 's such a thing as flesh.
"Your business is to paint the souls of men—
"Man's soul, and it 's a fire, smoke . . . no, it 's
not . . .
"It 's vapour done up like a new-born babe— 185
"(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)

MEN AND WOMEN

"It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
"Give us no more of body than shows soul!
"Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
"That sets us praising,—why not stop with him? 190
"Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
"With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
"Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
"Rub all out, try at it a second time.
"Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts, 195
"She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would
say,—
"Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
"Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further 200
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn, 205
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear, 210
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all— 215
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you
have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks. 220

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

“Rub all out!” Well, well, there ’s my life, in short,

And so the thing has gone on ever since.

I ’m grown a man no doubt, I ’ve broken bounds:

You should not take a fellow eight years old

And make him swear to never kiss the girls. 225

I ’m my own master, paint now as I please—

Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!

Lord, it ’s fast holding by the rings in front—

Those great rings serve more purposes than just

To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse! 230

And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes

Are peeping o’er my shoulder as I work,

The heads shake still—“It ’s art’s decline, my son!

“You ’re not of the true painters, great and old;

“Brother Angelico ’s the man, you ’ll find; 235

“Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:

“Fag on at flesh, you ’ll never make the third!”

Flower o’ the pine,

You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I ’ll stick to mine!

I ’m not the third, then: bless us, they must know! 240

Don’t you think they ’re the likeliest to know,

They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,

Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint

To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don’t;

For, doing most, there ’s pretty sure to come 245

A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—

A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—

(Flower o’ the peach,

Death for us all, and his own life for each!)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over, 250

The world and life ’s too big to pass for a dream,

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,

And play the fooleries you catch me at,

MEN AND WOMEN

In pure rage ! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so, 255
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they? all I want 's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is, 260
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself :
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught ; 265
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife : and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me : I 'm a beast, I know. 270
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star 's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We 've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop : 275
His name is Guidi—he 'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he 'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what 's sure to follow. You be judge ! 280
You speak no Latin more than I, belike ;
However, you 're my man, you 've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and
shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all ! 285
—For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

The mountain round it and the sky above,
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
 These are the frame to? What 's it all about? 290
 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
 Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
 But why not do as well as say,—paint these
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
 God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime 295
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
 "Are here already; nature is complete :
 "Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
 "There 's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
 For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love 300
 First when we see them painted, things we have
 passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;
 God uses us to help each other so, 305
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though! How
 much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth !
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place, 310
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good: 315
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
 "It does not say to folk—remember matins,
 "Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones, 320
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,

MEN AND WOMEN

A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style :
“How looks my painting, now the scaffold ’s
down?”

325

I ask a brother : “Hugely,” he returns—
“Already not one phiz of your three slaves
“Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
“But ’s scratched and prodded to our heart’s
content,

“The pious people have so eased their own
“With coming to say prayers there in a rage :
“We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
“Expect another job this time next year,
“For pity and religion grow i’ the crowd—
“Your painting serves its purpose !” Hang the
fools !

335

—That is—you ’ll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !
Oh, the church knows ! don’t misreport me, now !
It ’s natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself :
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece
. . . There ’s for you ! Give me six months,
then go, see
Something in Sant’ Ambrogio’s ! Bless the nuns !
They want a cast o’ my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.

345

350

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white 355
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come 360
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I 'm the
man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear? 365
I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing 370
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
"He made you and devised you, after all,
"Though he 's none of you! Could Saint John
there draw—
"His camel-hair make up a painting-brush? 375
"We come to brother Lippo for all that,
"*Iste perfecit opus!*" So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you 're gay 380
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing 385
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,

MEN AND WOMEN

Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would
say.

And so all 's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence !
Your hand, sir, and good-bye : no lights, no
lights !

The street 's hushed, and I know my own way³⁹⁰
back,

Don't fear me ! there 's the grey beginning.
Zooks !

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?
I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear, 5
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it ? tenderly ?
Oh, I 'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love ! 10
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole, 15
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this ! 20
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither ; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require :
It saves a model. So ! keep looking so— 25
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds !
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,

MEN AND WOMEN

Even to put the pearl there ! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his, 30
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's : very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there 's my picture ready made,
There 's what we painters call our harmony !
A common greyness silvers everything,— 35
All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That 's gone you know),—but I, at every point ;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole. 40
There 's the bell clinking from the chapel-top ;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside ;
The last monk leaves the garden ; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything. 45
Eh ? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead ; 50
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are !
I feel he laid the fether : let it lie !
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that 's behind us ! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art, 55
But you can hear at least when people speak :
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love ! so such things should be—
Behold Madonna !—I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know, 60
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,

ANDREA DEL SARTO

I do not boast, perhaps : yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week, 65
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 't is easy, all of it !
No sketches first, no studies, that 's long past :
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
—Dream ? strive to do, and agonize to do, 70
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,— 75
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less !
Well, less is more, Lucrezia : I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up
brain, 80
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of
mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I
know,
Reach many a time a heaven that 's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough, 85
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men ! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself, 90
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken ; what of that ? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered ; what of that ? 95
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care ?

MEN AND WOMEN

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what 's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art : the worse !
I know both what I want and what might gain, 100
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world !"

No doubt.

Yonder 's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago. 105
('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way ; 110
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak : its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it : 115
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me ! And wherefore out ?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you !
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think— 120
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare— 125
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind !
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory ! never care for gain.
"The present by the future, what is that ?
"Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo ! 130
"Rafael is waiting : up to God, all three !"

ANDREA DEL SARTO

I might have done it for you. So it seems :
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you ? 135
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo ?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not ;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :
Yet the will 's somewhat—somewhat, too, the
power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end, 140
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day, 145
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside ;
But they speak sometimes ; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak ! That Francis, that first
time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau ! 150
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or-twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile, 155
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls 160
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days ? 165

MEN AND WOMEN

And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—
'T is done and past; 't was right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I 'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world. 170
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold, 175
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
"The Roman's is the better when you pray,
"But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge 180
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . . 185
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there 's a certain sorry little scrub
"Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how, 190
"Who, were he set to plan and execute
"As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
"Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see, 195
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the lines should go!
Ay, but the soul! he 's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?) 200
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—

ANDREA DEL SARTO

Is, whether you 're—not grateful—but more
pleased.

Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed !
This hour has been an hour ! Another smile ?

If you would sit thus by me every night 205

I should work better, do you comprehend ?

I mean that I should earn more, give you more.

See, it is settled dusk now ; there 's a star ;

Morello 's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,

The cue-owls speak the name we call them by. 210

Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,

Inside the melancholy little house

We built to be so gay with. God is just.

King Francis may forgive me : oft at nights

When I look up from painting, eyes tired out, 215

The walls become illumined, brick from brick

Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,

That gold of his I did cement them with !

Let us but love each other. Must you go ?

That Cousin here again ? he waits outside ? 220

Must see you—you, and not with me ? Those
loans ?

More gaming debts to pay ? you smiled for that ?

Well, let smiles buy me ! have you more to spend ?

While hand and eye and something of a heart

Are left me, work 's my ware, and what 's it worth ? 225

I 'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit

The grey remainder of the evening out,

Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly

How I could paint, were I but back in France,

One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face, 230

Not yours this time ! I want you at my side

To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—

Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.

Will you ? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.

I take the subjects for his corridor, 235

MEN AND WOMEN

Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs ; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What 's better and what 's all I care about, 240
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff !
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin ! what does he to please you more ?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less. 245
Since there my past life lies, why alter it ?
The very wrong to Francis !—it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want. 250
Well, had I riches of my own ? you see
How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they
died :

And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son 255
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try !
No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance.
Yes,

You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have ?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more
chance— 260

Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine ! So—still they overcome 265
Because there 's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH

ROME, 15—

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity !
Draw round my bed : is Anselm keeping back ?
Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not !
Well—

She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was ! 5
What 's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world 's a dream.
Life, how and what is it ? As here I lie 10
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
“ Do I live, am I dead ? ” Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace ;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought 15
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know ;
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care ;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same !
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence 20
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam 's sure to lurk :
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there, 25

MEN AND WOMEN

And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands :
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse. 30
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him ! True peach,
Rosy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
Draw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were
missed ! 35
My sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press
stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I ! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft, 40
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all, 45
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst ! 50
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'T was ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath ? 55
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB

Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan 60
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp 65
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at !
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas ! 70
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There 's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ? 75
—That 's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters ? Ulpian serves his need !
And then how I shall lie through centuries, 80
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke !
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night, 85
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can
point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work : 90
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,

MEN AND WOMEN

Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount, 95
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
 —Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best! 100
 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
 All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
 My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul, 105
 Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
 And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down, 110
 To comfort me on my entablature
 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
 "Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
 To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone— 115
 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which
 sweat
 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
 And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
 Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs 120
 —Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
 That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
 Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
 As still he envied me, so fair she was! 125

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

No more wine? then we 'll push back chairs
and talk.

A final glass for me, though : cool, i' faith !
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
It 's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece 5
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart !
I doubt if they 're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere ;
It 's just like breathing in a lime-kiln : eh ?
These hot long ceremonies of our church 10
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it ! Now, we 'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir !
Beside 't is our engagement : don't you know, 15
I promised, if you 'd watch a dinner out,
We 'd see truth dawn together?—truth that peeps
Over the glasses' edge when dinner 's done,
And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now 's the time : 20
Truth's break of day ! You do despise me then.
And if I say, "despise me,"—never fear !
I know you do not in a certain sense—
Not in my arm-chair, for example : here,
I well imagine you respect my place 25
(*Status, entourage*, worldly circumstance)
Quite to its value—very much indeed :

MEN AND WOMEN

—Are up to the protesting eyes of you
In pride at being seated here for once—
You 'll turn it to such capital account ! 30
When somebody, through years and years to come,
Hints of the bishop,—names me—that 's enough :
“ Blougram ? I knew him ”—(into it you slide)
“ Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
“ All alone, we two ; he 's a clever man : 35
“ And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—
“ Oh, there was wine, and good !—what with the
wine . . .
“ ‘ Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk !
“ He 's no bad fellow, Blougram ; he had seen
“ Something of mine he relished, some review : 40
“ He 's quite above their humbug in his heart,
“ Half-said as much, indeed—the thing 's his trade.
“ I warrant, Blougram 's sceptical at times :
“ How otherwise ? I liked him, I confess ! ”
Che che, my dear sir, as we say at Rome, 45
Don't you protest now ! It 's fair give and take ;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-
truths :
The hand 's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
You do despise me ; your ideal of life 50
Is not the bishop's : you would not be I.
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,
Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help, 55
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole your-
self.
—That, my ideal never can include,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Upon that element of truth and worth 60
Never be based ! for say they make me Pope—
(They can't—suppose it for our argument !)
Why, there I 'm at my tether's end, I 've reached
My height, and not a height which pleases you :
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say. 65
It 's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
Of how some actor on a stage played Death,
With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled
dart,
And called himself the monarch of the world ;
Then, going in the tire-room afterward, 70
Because the play was done, to shift himself,
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,
The moment he had shut the closet door,
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean, 75
And whose part he presumed to play just now.
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true !

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find, whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realized 80
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realize one jot.
I am much, you are nothing ; you would be all,
I would be merely much : you beat me there. 85

No, friend, you do not beat me : hearken why !
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair 90
Up to our means : a very different thing !
No abstract intellectual plan of life

MEN AND WOMEN

Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave) 95
Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealize away,
Make paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile !

We mortals cross the ocean of this world 100
Each in his average cabin of a life ;
The best 's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare ?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient : so they are ! 105
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long ;
And little Greek books, with the funny type 110
They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next :
Go on ! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes !
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add !
'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams, 115
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese !—
Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.
—Alas, friend, here 's the agent . . . is 't the name?
The captain, or whoever 's master here— 120
You see him screw his face up ; what 's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard ? "Six feet square!"
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if, in pique because he overhauls 125
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Bare—why, you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off ;
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards 130
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug—
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice !)
And mortified you mutter " Well and good ;
" He sits enjoying his sea-furniture ; 135
" 'T is stout and proper, and there 's store of it :
" Though I 've the better notion, all agree,
" Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,
" Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
" I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all !" 140
And meantime you bring nothing : never mind—
You 've proved your artist-nature : what you don't
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let 's backward to the starting-place.
See my way : we 're two college friends, suppose. 145
Prepare together for our voyage, then ;
Each note and check the other in his work,—
Here 's mine, a bishop's outfit ; criticize !
What 's wrong ? why won't you be a bishop too ?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't, 150
(Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
And absolutely and exclusively)
In any revelation called divine.
No dogmas nail your faith ; and what remains
But say so, like the honest man you are ? 155
First, therefore, overhaul theology !
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
Must find believing every whit as hard :
And if I do not frankly say as much,
The ugly consequence is clear enough. 160

MEN AND WOMEN

Now wait, my friend : well, I do not believe—
If you 'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
You 're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time.
Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie 165
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve—
(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
With both of us, though in unlike degree,
Missing full credence—overboard with them ! 170
I mean to meet you on your own premise :
Good, there go mine in company with yours !

And now what are we ? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray ? 175
You 'll guarantee me that ? Not so, I think !
In no wise ! all we 've gained is, that belief,
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
Confounds us like its predecessor. Where 's
The gain ? how can we guard our unbelief, 180
Make it bear fruit to us ?—the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there 's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that 's enough for fifty hopes and fears 185
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps ! We look on helplessly. 190
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could—then must have done long since:
If so, when, where and how ? some way must be,—
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit 195

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

—That way
Over the mountain, which who stands upon
Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road ;
While, if he views it from the waste itself, 200
Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
Not vague, mistakable ! what 's a break or two
Seen from the unbroken desert either side ?
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last 205
The most consummate of contrivances
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith ?
And so we stumble at truth's very test !
All we have gained then by our unbelief
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith, 210
For one of faith diversified by doubt :
We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end 's no worse, at
least ;
"We 've reason for both colours on the board :
"Why not confess then, where I drop the faith 215
"And you the doubt, that I 'm as right as you ?"

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even,—faith and unbelief
Left to a man's choice,—we 'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like. 220

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin passenger's—
The man made for the special life o' the world—
Do you forget him ? I remember though !
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all ; 225
The choice, that you unluckily prefer,
Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it

MEN AND WOMEN

Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world 230
Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I ;
I mean to take it as it is,—and you,
Not so you 'll take it,—though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy, 235
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
—For you, it does, however?—that, we 'll try ! 240
'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,
Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, “ Friends,
“ I absolutely and peremptorily
“ Believe ! ”—I say, faith is my waking life : 245
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking 's the main point with us,
And my provision 's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hand
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends ; 250
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What 's midnight doubt before the dayspring's
faith ?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve, 255
That recognizeth the night, giveth dreamstheir weight—
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares !
And certainly at night you 'll sleep and dream, 260
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

To unbelieve as I to still believe ?
Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you
Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me. 265
Its estimation, which is half the fight,
That 's the first-cabin comfort I secure :
The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye !
Come, come, it 's best believing, if we may ;
You can't but own that !

Next, concede again, 270
If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too decisive in our faith,
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
To suit the world which gives us the good things.
In every man's career are certain points 275
Whereon he dares not be indifferent ;
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose, 280
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these ;
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool 285
Because his fellow would choose otherwise :
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he 's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on, 290
We say he must succeed there or go hang.
Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently, 295
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,

MEN AND WOMEN

Whate'er the process of conviction was :
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge :
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul. 300

Well now, there 's one great form of Christian
faith

I happened to be born in—which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by ;
The same on examination being proved 305
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world—
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend !
Such as you know me, I am free to say, 310
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself—by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, but the tact
To let external forces work for me,
—Bid the street's stones be bread and they are
bread ; 315

Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride ;
It does so,—which for me 's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact 320
A comfortable care in many ways.
There 's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else :
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that 's born of fear : 325
While at the same time, there 's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon :

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

I must take what men offer, with a grace 330
As though I would not, could I help it, take !
An uniform I wear though over-rich—
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine ;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake
And despicable therefore ! now folk kneel 335
And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured ;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You 'll reply, 340
So far my choice, no doubt, is a success ;
But were I made of better elements,
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
I hardly would account the thing success
Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend, 345
We speak of what is ; not of what might be,
And how 't were better if 't were otherwise.
I am the man you see here plain enough :
Grant I 'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts'
lives !

Suppose I own at once to tail and claws ; 350
The tailless man exceeds me : but being tailed
I 'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches
up.

My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made. 355
Or—our first simile—though you prove me doomed
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible ;

MEN AND WOMEN

And as this cabin gets upholstery, 360
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find 365
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than should judge?
And that 's no way of holding up the soul, 370
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet
knows

One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'—
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes
that.

I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense 375
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave,—approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way : 380
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence,—what 's its
name?)

While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths 385
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—
That even your prime men who appraise their kind
Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self, 390
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Sixty the minute ; what 's to note in that ?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack ;
Him you must watch—he 's sure to fall, yet stands !
Our interest 's on the dangerous edge of things. 395
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French
books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway : one step aside, 400
They 're classed and done with. I, then, keep
the line
Before your sages,—just the men to shrink
From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels
broad
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave ?
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave 405
When there 's a thousand diamond weights between ?
So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you 'll find
Profess themselves indignant, scandalized
At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves 410
May not believe as well : that 's Schelling's way !
It 's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago
They 'd say, "What 's strange ? Blougram of
course believes " ; 415
And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe ; and yet, and yet
"How can he ?" All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side—
You, for example, clever to a fault, 420
The rough and ready man who write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even
less—

MEN AND WOMEN

You disbelieve ! Who wonders and who cares ?
Lord So-and-so—his coat bedropped with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back 425
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom—
Believes ! Again, who wonders and who cares ?
But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day ! 430
Enough ; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours ! Admire me as these may,
You don't. But whom at least do you admire ?
Present your own perfection, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste, 435
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow ?
Concede the means ; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)
Good ! In our common primal element
Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know— 440
We're still at that admission, recollect !)
Where do you find—apart from, towering o'er
The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise—
Where do you find his star ?—his crazy trust 445
God knows through what or in what ? it's alive
And shines and leads him, and that's all we want.
Have we aught in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his, 450
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same ?
—Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve—
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away !
What's the vague good o' the world, for which
you dare 455
With comfort to yourself blow millions up ?

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

We neither of us see it ! we do see
The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement 460
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time !
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)
His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk, 465
“The State, that 's I,” quack-nonsense about
crowns,
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
A vague idea of setting things to rights,
Policing people efficaciously,
More to their profit, most of all to his own ; 470
The whole to end that dimmest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,
And resurrection of the old *régime* ?
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such ? 475
No : for, concede me but the merest chance
Doubt may be wrong—there 's judgment, life to
come !
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves
right ?
This present life is all ?—you offer me
Its dozen noisy years, without a chance 480
That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,
And getting called by divers new-coined names,
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !
Therefore I will not.

Take another case ; 485
Fit up the cabin yet another way.
What say you to the poets ? shall we write

MEN AND WOMEN

Hamlet, Othello—make the world our own,
Without a risk to run of either sort ?
I can't !—to put the strongest reason first. 490
“ But try,” you urge, “ the trying shall suffice ;
“ The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life :
“ Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate ! ”
Spare my self-knowledge—there 's no fooling me !
If I prefer remaining my poor self, 495
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.
If I 'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone ;
Why should I try to be what now I am ?
If I 'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,—
His power and consciousness and self-delight 500
And all we want in common, shall I find—
Trying for ever ? while on points of taste
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I
Are dowered alike—I 'll ask you, I or he,
Which in our two lives realizes most ? 505
Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.
He had the imagination ; stick to that !
Let him say, “ In the face of my soul's works
“ Your world is worthless and I touch it not
“ Lest I should wrong them ”—I 'll withdraw my
plea. 510
But does he say so ? look upon his life !
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town ;
Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things, 515
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute ;
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,
And none more, had he seen its entry once,
Than “ Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal.”
Why then should I who play that personage, 520
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,
Be told that had the poet chanced to start

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

From where I stand now (some degree like mine
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth, 525
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays ?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best !
Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls, 530
And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).
—Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top—
Eh, friend ? I could not fancy one of these ;
But, as I pour this claret, there they are : 535
I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside ; is my hap the worse for that ?
We want the same things, Shakespeare and my-
self,
And what I want, I have : he, gifted more, 540
Could fancy he too had them when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,
He would not have them also in my sense.
We play one game ; I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes 545
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me : I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms, 550
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game ?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up. 555
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat ;

MEN AND WOMEN

Only, we can't command it ; fire and life
Are all, dead matter 's nothing, we agree :
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact 's the same,—belief's fire, once in us, 560
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself :
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,
That burns to ash—all 's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success. 565
But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I 'll find it food enough !
Why, to be Luther—that 's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he
says, 570
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind ;
Such Luther's luck was : how shall such be mine?
If he succeeded, nothing 's left to do : 575
And if he did not altogether—well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result ?
He looks upon no future : Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side ? 580
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world—
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you : Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,—not to him 585
More than Saint Paul! 't would press its pay, you
think ?
Then add there 's still that plaguy hundredth
chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—
For what gain ? not for Luther's, who secured

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

A real heaven in his heart throughout his life, 590
Supposing death a little altered things.

“Ay, but since really you lack faith,” you cry,
“You run the same risk really on all sides,
“In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
“As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him. 595
“It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,
“No more available to do faith's work
“Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none!”

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.
Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith. 600
We're back on Christian ground. You call for
faith :

I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that! 605
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice :
That's our one act, the previous work's his own.
You criticize the soul? it reared this tree—
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!
What matter though I doubt at every pore, 610
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers'
ends,

Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show, 615
The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?
All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this? 620
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,

MEN AND WOMEN

God means mankind should strive for and show forth

Whatever be the process to that end,—

And not historic knowledge, logic sound,

And metaphysical acumen, sure !

625

“What think ye of Christ,” friend? when all 's done and said,

Like you this Christianity or not?

It may be false, but will you wish it true?

Has it your vote to be so if it can?

Trust you an instinct silenced long ago

630

That will break silence and enjoin you love

What mortified philosophy is hoarse,

And all in vain, with bidding you despise?

If you desire faith—then you 've faith enough :

What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves?

635

You form a notion of me, we 'll suppose,

On hearsay ; it 's a favourable one :

“Butstill”(you add), “therewasnosuchgood man,

“Because of contradiction in the facts.

“One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome, 640

“This Blougram ; yet throughout the tales of him

“I see he figures as an Englishman.”

Well, the two things are reconcileable.

But would I rather you discovered that,

Subjoining—“Still, what matter though they be? 645

“Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there.”

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!

Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,

Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much

The sense of conscious creatures to be borne. 650

It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.

Some think, Creation 's meant to show him forth :

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

I say it 's meant to hide him all it can,
And that 's what all the blessed evil 's for.
Its use in Time is to environ us, 655
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once 660
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live ;
The feeblest sense is trusted most ; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us. 665
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that 's too ambitious,—here 's my box—
I need the excitation of a pinch 670
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
“Leave it in peace” advise the simple folk :
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith ! 675

You 'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you 'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not, 680
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith 's about to die),
And set you square with Genesis again,—
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat 685
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot !

MEN AND WOMEN

How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did ;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob, 690
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
Full in belief's face, like the beast you 'd be !

No, when the fight begins within himself,
Aman's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug— 695
He 's left, himself, i' the middle : the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life !
Never leave growing till the life to come !
Here, we 've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely : 700
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them?—brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—
On to the rack with faith !—is my advice. 705
Will not that hurry us upon our knees,
Knocking our breasts, " It can't be—yet it shall !
" Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope ?
" Low things confound the high things ! " and so
forth.
That 's better than acquitting God with grace 710
As some folk do. He 's tried—no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient—he may go !

You 'll say, the old system 's not so obsolete
But men believe still : ay, but who and where ?
King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet 715
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes ;
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him ? Break fire's law, 720

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles ;
"Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,
My faith 's still greater, then my faith 's enough. 725
I have read much, thought much, experienced
much,

Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time. 730
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, decrassify my faith
Since I adopt it ; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can—such points as this. 735
I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.
Supposing there 's no truth in what I hold
About the need of trial to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end.
Clearing off one excrescence to see two, 740
There 's ever a next in size, now grown as big,
That meets the knife : I cut and cut again !
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?
Experimentalize on sacred things ! 745
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

You 'd find the cutting-process to your taste
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned, 750
Nor see more danger in it,—you retort.
Your taste 's worth mine ; but my taste proves
more wise

MEN AND WOMEN

When we consider that the steadfast hold
On the extreme end of the chain of faith
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference 755
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule :
We are their lords, or they are free of us,
Just as we tighten or relax our hold.
So, other matters equal, we 'll revert
To the first problem—which, if solved my way 760
And thrown into the balance, turns the scale—
How we may lead a comfortable life,
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life, 765
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
"The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world prizes action, life and talk : 770
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge
To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though) 775
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyment : well, my friend,
Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense ?

Do you know, I have often had a dream 780
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still
Losing true life for ever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being—
In the evolution of successive spheres— 785
Before its actual sphere and place of life,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Halfway into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery
Halfway into the next still, on and off !
As when a traveller, bound from North to South, 790
Scouts fur in Russia : what 's its use in France ?
In France spurns flannel : where 's its need in
Spain ?

In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers !
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
A superfluity at Timbuctoo. 795
When, through his journey, was the fool at ease ?
I 'm at ease now, friend ; worldly in this world,
I take and like its way of life ; I think
My brothers, who administer the means,
Live better for my comfort—that 's good too ; 800
And God, if he pronounce upon such life,
Approves my service, which is better still.
If he keep silence,—why, for you or me
Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"
What odds is 't, save to ourselves, what life we
lead ? 805

You meet me at this issue : you declare,—
All special-pleading done with—truth is truth,
And justifies itself by undreamed ways.
You don't fear but it 's better, if we doubt,
To say so, act up to our truth perceived 810
However feebly. Do then,—act away !
'T is there I 'm on the watch for you. How one
acts

Is, both of us agree, our chief concern :
And how you 'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear, 815
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there 's no higher law that counterchecks.

MEN AND WOMEN

Put natural religion to the test
You 've just demolished the revealed with—quick, 820
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill and thief,
Or even to be an atheistic priest !
Suppose a pricking to incontinence—
Philosophers deduce you chastity 825
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand ; 830
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves :
I read this in a French book t' other day.
Does law so analysed coerce you much ?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end, 835
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You 'll soon cut that !—which means you can, but
won't,
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,
You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule. 840
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
In case he has a master after all !
You own your instincts ? why, what else do I, 845
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught ?—no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its
truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel, 850
And with it take the rest, this life of ours !
I live my life here ; yours you dare not live.

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

—Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, to your mind, remains another way 855
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about :
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see, 860
And if we can't, be glad we 've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.
Men are not angels, neither are they brutes :
Something we may see, all we cannot see. 865
What need of lying? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a Pan's face—you, mere cloud :
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis, 870
Mankind may doubt there 's any cloud at all.
You take the simple life—ready to see,
Willing to see (for no cloud 's worth a face)—
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right? 875
I bid you ; but you are God's sheep, not mine :
“*Pastor est tui Dominus.*” You find
In this the pleasant pasture of our life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects, 880
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself, offending them ;
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep, 885
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you, real checks since you find them so ;

MEN AND WOMEN

Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks:
And thus you graze through life with not one lie, 890
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name ?
If so, you beat—which means you are not I—
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward 895
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir ; my age is double yours :
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be—as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range 900
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike :
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,
My daily bread, my influence and my state ?
You're young. I'm old ; you must be old one day ; 905
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,
Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch—
Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring—
With much beside you know or may conceive ? 910
Suppose we die to-night : well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles
On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek. 915
But you—the highest honour in your life,
The thing you 'll crown yourself with, all your
days,
Is—dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power 920
And social influence, worldly worth in short,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Judge what 's my estimation by the fact,
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words !
You 're shrewd and know that should you publish
one

925

The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,
Who 'd sneer—"the bishop 's an arch-hypocrite
"And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile, 930
Before the chaplain who reflects myself—
My shade 's so much more potent than your flesh.
What 's your reward, self-abnegating friend ?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine— 935
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art—
I should have nothing to object : such men 940
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget 's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you,—you 're just as little those as I—
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine, 945
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul
Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you 'll
print—

Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens,—what 's its name ? 950
"The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life
"Limned after dark !" it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month, and brought you in ten
pounds.

—Success I recognize and compliment,

MEN AND WOMEN

And therefore give you, if you choose, three words 955
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours. 960
Go write your lively sketches! be the first
"Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence"—
Or better simply say, "The Outward-bound."
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad 965
About me on the church-door opposite.
You will not wait for that experience though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,
To discontinue—not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least—despising me! 970

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*
Episcopus, nec non—(the deuce knows what
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man, 975
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind
Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay
smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke. 980
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new, 985

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)
While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak
tongue 990
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)
He ignored these,—not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy : 995
He said true things, but called them by wrong
names.
“On the whole,” he thought, “I justify myself
“On every point where cavillers like this
“Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence,
“I close, he 's worsted, that 's enough for him. 1000
“He 's on the ground : if ground should break
away
“I take my stand on, there 's a firmer yet
“Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.
“His ground was over mine and broke the first :
“So, let him sit with me this many a year !” 1005

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
Something had struck him in the “Outward-
bound”

Another way than Blougram's purpose was :
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three) 1010
And started for Australia—there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

CLEON

"As certain also of your own poets have said"—

CLEON the poet (from the sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps
"Greece")—
To Protus in his Tyranny : much health !

They give thy letter to me, even now : 5
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift ; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee : 10
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest 15
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence !
For so shall men remark, in such an act 20
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life ;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest. 25

CLEON

Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,—
 Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
 Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
 Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
 Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,— 30
 Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—
 Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
 Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
 Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,
 Thou first of men mightst look out to the East : 35
 The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.
 For this, I promise on thy festival
 To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,
 Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak
 Thy great words, and describe thy royal face— 40
 Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
 Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
 It is as thou hast heard : in one short life
 I, Cleon, have effected all those things 45
 Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
 That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
 Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,
 So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
 When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net. 50
 The image of the sun-god on the phare,
 Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine ;
 The Poecile, o'er-storied its whole length,
 As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
 I know the true proportions of a man 55
 And woman also, not observed before ;
 And I have written three books on the soul,
 Proving absurd all written hitherto,
 And putting us to ignorance again.
 For music,—why, I have combined the moods, 60

MEN AND WOMEN

Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine ;
Thus much the people know and recognize,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite, 65
Look not so great, beside their simple way,
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point and no other at a time,—
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age, 70
Great in his way—not ours, nor meant for ours.
And ours is greater, had we skill to know :
For, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements here
Being, as I find much reason to conceive, 75
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
But each part having reference to all,—
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,
Endure effacement by another part ? 80
Was the thing done ?—then, what 's to do again ?
See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—
He did not overlay them, superimpose 85
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,
Making at last a picture ; there it lies.
So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
The portions of mankind ; and after, so, 90
Occurred the combination of the same.
For where had been a progress, otherwise ?
Mankind, made up of all the single men,—
In such a synthesis the labour ends.
Now mark me ! those divine men of old time 95
Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point

CLEON

The outside verge that rounds our faculty ;
And where they reached, who can do more than
reach ?

It takes but little water just to touch
At some one point the inside of a sphere, 100
And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest
In due succession : but the finer air
Which not so palpably nor obviously,
Though no less universally, can touch
The whole circumference of that emptied sphere, 105
Fills it more fully than the water did ;
Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
Resolved into a subtler element.

And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
Up to the visible height—and after, void ; 110
Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus
To vindicate his purpose in our life :

Why stay we on the earth unless to grow ?
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out, 115
That he or other god descended here
And, once for all, showed simultaneously
What, in its nature, never can be shown,
Piecemeal or in succession ;—showed, I say,
The worth both absolute and relative 120
Of all his children from the birth of time,
His instruments for all appointed work.

I now go on to image,—might we hear
The judgment which should give the due to each,
Show where the labour lay and where the ease, 125
And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere !
This is a dream :—but no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs,
Follow each other with unwaning powers.
The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far, 130
Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock ;

MEN AND WOMEN

The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe ;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet ;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers ;
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave, 135
Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates ?
I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—
Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved 140
And painted men like Phidias and his friend :
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each other's art. 145
Say, is it nothing that I know them all ?
The wild flower was the larger ; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large : 150
I stand myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is ! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate ? 155
It might have fallen to another's hand : what then ?
I pass too surely : let at least truth stay !

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicoloured kinds, 160
So done by me, accepted so by men—
Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life ?
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up, 165
I face death with success in my right hand :

CLEON

Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men ? " For " (writest thou)
" Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.
" Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing, 170
" The pictures men shall study ; while my life,
" Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
" Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
" Is lost indeed ; since, what survives myself ?
" The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave, 175
" Set on the promontory which I named.
" And that—some supple courtier of my heir
" Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
" To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
" I go then : triumph thou, who dost not go ! " 180

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.
Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows ?
That imperfection means perfection hid, 185
Reserved in part, to grace the after-time ?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,
Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have
looked
On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird, 190
Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage—
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced
The perfectness of others yet unseen.
Conceding which,—had Zeus' then questioned
thee
" Shall I go on a step, improve on this, 195
" Do more for visible creatures than is done ? "
Thou wouldst have answered, " Ay, bymaking each
" Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.
" All 's perfect else : the shell sucks fast the rock,
165

MEN AND WOMEN

"The fish strikes through the sea, the snake
both swims 200
"And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds
take flight,
"Till life's mechanics can no further go—
"And all this joy in natural life is put
"Like fire from off thy finger into each,
"So exquisitely perfect is the same. 205
"But 't is pure fire, and they mere matter are ;
"It has them, not they it : and so I choose
"For man, thy last premeditated work
"(If I might add a glory to the scheme)
"That a third thing should stand apart from both, 210
"A quality arise within his soul,
"Which, intro-active, made to supervise
"And feel the force it has, may view itself,
"And so be happy." Man might live at first
The animal life : but is there nothing more ? 215
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives ; and, the more he gets to know
Of his own life's adaptabilities,
The more joy-giving will his life become.
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best. 220

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said :
"Let progress end at once,—man make no step
"Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
"Using his senses, not the sense of sense."
In man there 's failure, only since he left 225
The lower and unconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,
And, by new lore so added to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head. 230
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,

CLEON

Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to ;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas, 235
The soul now climbs it just to perish there !
For thence we have discovered ('t is no dream—
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there 's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us, 240
Inviting us ; and still the soul craves all,
And still the flesh replies, " Take no jot more
" Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad !
" Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought
" Deduction to it." We struggle, fain to en-
large 245
Our bounded physical recipiency,
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,
Repair the waste of age and sickness : no,
It skills not ! life 's inadequate to joy,
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take. 250
They praise a fountain in my garden here
Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow
Thin from her tube ; she smiles to see it rise.
What if I told her, it is just a thread
From that great river which the hills shut up, 255
And mock her with my leave to take the same ?
The artificer has given her one small tube
Past power to widen or exchange—what boots
To know she might spout oceans if she could ?
She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread : 260
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,
" See, man, how happy I live, and despair—
" That I may be still happier—for thy use !"
If this were so, we could not thank our lord, 265
As hearts beat on to doing ; 't is not so—
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness ?

MEN AND WOMEN

Still, no. If care—where is the sign? I ask,
And get no answer, and agree in sum,
O king, with thy profound discouragement, 270
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.
Most progress is most failure: thou sayest
well.

The last point now:—thou dost except a case—
Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts—to such a man as I 275
Who leave behind me living works indeed;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine) 280
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living?—Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display 285
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act—
Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I 'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art! 290
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I. 295
I can write love-odes: thy fair slave's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too grey
For being beloved: she turns to that young
man,

The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king! 300

CLEON

"But," sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat
 To find thee trip on such a mere word) "what
 "Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:
 "Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
 "And Æschylus, because we read his plays!" 305
 Why, if they live still, let them come and take
 Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,
 Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
 Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,
 In this, that every day my sense of joy 310
 Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
 By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
 While every day my hairs fall more and more,
 My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—
 The horror quickening still from year to year, 315
 The consummation coming past escape
 When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—
 When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
 Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
 Alive still, in the praise of such as thou, 320
 I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
 The man who loved his life so over-much,
 Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
 I dare at times imagine to my need
 Some future state revealed to us by Zeus, 325
 Unlimited in capability
 For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
 —To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:
 That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
 On purpose to make prized the life at large— 330
 Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
 We burst there as the worm into the fly,
 Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But
 no!
 Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
 He must have done so, were it possible! 335

MEN AND WOMEN

Live long and happy, and in that thought die :
Glad for what was ! Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus ; we have heard his fame 340
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcized,
Hath access to a secret shut from us ? 345
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all !
He writeth, doth he ? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars ! certain slaves 350
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and
Christ ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

I

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world ; and, vainly favoured, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He cannot have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach ; and, in the lost endeavour
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun,
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.
Men nobly call by many a name the Mount
As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,
Each to its proper praise and own account :
Men call the Flower the Sunflower, sportively.

II

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
—The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook !

III

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed ?
Go !—saying ever as thou dost proceed,

MEN AND WOMEN

That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice
Before its idol. See ! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture ; 't is a woman's skill
Indeed ; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad :
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East—the East ! Go, say this, Pilgrim
dear !

ONE WORD MORE¹

TO E. B. B.

1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together :
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets, 5
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas :
These, the world might view—but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask ? Your heart instructs you. 10
Did she live and love it all her life-time ?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving— 15
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's ?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)

¹ Originally appended to the collection of Poems called "Men and Women," the greater portion of which has now been, more correctly, distributed under the other titles of this edition [R. B., 1868].

MEN AND WOMEN

Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael, 20
Would we not ? than wonder at Madonnas—
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre—
Seen by us and all the world in circle. 25

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the
treasure ! " 30
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel :
Whom to please ? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded 35
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle, 40
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno. 45
Says he—"Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

ONE WORD MORE

VI

You and I would rather see that angel, 50
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel, 55
In they broke, those "people of importance":
We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only, 60
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving, 65
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only, 70
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's sabatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him, 75
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,

MEN AND WOMEN

Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril, 80
When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting
help us?"
When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their
journey,
Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was
pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph ; 85
Thus the doing savours of disrelish ;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat ;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him, 90
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
"Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better." 95

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant !
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands, 100
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert ; 105
Ready in the desert to deliver

ONE WORD MORE

(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues, 110
Make you music that should all-express me ;
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing : 115
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time. 120
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets. 125
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy, 130
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving :
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's, 135
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.

MEN AND WOMEN

Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence :
Pray you, look on these my men and women, 140
Take and keep my fifty poems finished ;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence, 145
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato, 150
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver, 155
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy ?
Nay : for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos) 160
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even ! 165
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better !

ONE WORD MORE

Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders, 170
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest, 175
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also !

XVII

What were seen ? None knows, none ever shall
know. 180
Only this is sure—the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with, 185
One to show a woman when he loves her !

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love !
This to you—yourself my moon of poets !
Ah, but that 's the world's side, there 's the
wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know
you ! 190
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel 195
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

MEN AND WOMEN

XVI

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom !

200

R. B.

IN A BALCONY

PERSONS

**NORBERT
CONSTANCE
THE QUEEN**

IN A BALCONY

1853

CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT

Norbert. Now !

Constance. Not now !

Norbert. Give me them again,
those hands :

Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs !
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through !
You cruellest, you dearest in the world,
Let me ! The Queen must grant whate'er I ask— 5
How can I gain you and not ask the Queen ?
There she stays waiting for me, here stand you ;
Some time or other this was to be asked ;
Now is the one time—what I ask, I gain :
Let me ask now, Love !

Constance. Do, and ruin us. 10

Norbert. Let it be now, Love ! All my soul
breaks forth.

How I do love you ! Give my love its way !
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate—
Grant me my heaven now ! Let me know you
mine, 15

Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul !

IN A BALCONY

Constance. I am not yours then? How content
this man!

I am not his—who change into himself, 20
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,
Give all that was of me away to him—
So well, that now my spirit, turned his own,
Takes part with him against the woman here, 25
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw
As caring that the world be cognizant
How he loves her and how she worships him.
You have this woman, not as yet that world.
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me 30
By saving what I cease to care about,
The courtly name and pride of circumstance—
The name you 'll pick up and be cumbered with
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing more;
Just that the world may slip from under you— 35
Just that the world may cry "So much for him—
"The man predestined to the heap of crowns:
"There goes his chance of winning one, at least!"

Norbert. The world!

Constance. You love it. Love me quite as well,
And see if I shall pray for this in vain! 40
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks?

Norbert. You pray for—what, in vain?

Constance. Oh my heart's heart,
How I do love you, Norbert! That is right:
But listen, or I take my hands away!
You say, "let it be now": you would go now 45
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,
You love me—so you do, thank God!

Norbert. Thank God!

Constance. Yes, Norbert,—but you fain would
tell your love,
And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her

IN A BALCONY

My hand. Now take this rose and look at it, 50
 Listening to me. You are the minister,
 The Queen's first favourite, nor without a cause.
 To-night completes your wonderful year's-work
 (This palace-feast is held to celebrate)
 Made memorable by her life's success, 55
 The junction of two crowns, on her sole head,
 Her house had only dreamed of anciently :
 That this mere dream is grown a stable truth,
 To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose the
 praise ?

Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved 60
 What turned the many heads and broke the hearts?
 You are the fate, your minute 's in the heaven.
 Next comes the Queen's turn. "Name your own
 reward !"

With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,
 Put out an arm and touch and take the sun 65
 And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,
 Possess yourself supremely of her life,—
 You choose the single thing she will not grant ;
 Nay, very declaration of which choice
 Will turn the scale and neutralize your work : 70
 At best she will forgive you, if she can.

You think I 'll let you choose—her cousin's hand?
Norbert. Wait. First, do you retain your old
 belief

The Queen is generous,—nay, is just ?

Constance.

There, there !

So men make women love them, while they know 75
 No more of women's hearts than . . . look you
 here,

You that are just and generous beside,

Make it your own case ! For example now,

I 'll say—I let you kiss me, hold my hands—

Why? do you know why? I 'll instruct you, then— 80

IN A BALCONY

The kiss, because you have a name at court ;
This hand and this, that you may shut in each
A jewel, if you please to pick up such.
That 's horrible ? Apply it to the Queen—
Suppose I am the Queen to whom you speak : 85
“ I was a nameless man ; you needed me :
“ Why did I proffer you my aid ? there stood
“ A certain pretty cousin at your side.
“ Why did I make such common cause with you ?
“ Access to her had not been easy else. 90
“ You give my labour here abundant praise ?
“ ‘ Faith, labour, which she overlooked, grew play.
“ How shall your gratitude discharge itself ?
“ Give me her hand ! ”

Norbert. And still I urge the same.
Is the Queen just ? just—generous or no ! 95
Constance. Yes, just. You love a rose ; no harm
in that :

But was it for the rose's sake or mine
You put it in your bosom ? mine, you said—
Then, mine you still must say or else be false.
You told the Queen you served her for herself ; 100
If so, to serve her was to serve yourself,
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face !
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,
One sees the twenty pictures ; there 's a life
Better than life, and yet no life at all. 105
Conceive her born in such a magic dome,
Pictures all round her ! why, she sees the world,
Can recognize its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath, 110
Chases and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and
fruit—

And who shall question that she knows them all,

IN A BALCONY

In better semblance than the things outside ?
Yet bring into the silent gallery 115
Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,
Some lion, with the painted lion there—
You think she 'll understand composedly ?
—Say, “that 's his fellow in the hunting-piece
“Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred times?” 120
Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.
The real exists for us outside, not her :
How should it, with that life in these four walls— 125
That father and that mother, first to last
No father and no mother—friends, a heap,
Lovers, no lack—a husband in due time,
And every one of them alike a lie !
Things painted by a Rubens out of nought 130
Into what kindness, friendship, love should be ;
All better, all more grandiose than the life,
Only no life ; mere cloth and surface-paint,
You feel, while you admire. How should she feel ?
Yet now that she has stood thus fifty years 135
The sole spectator in that gallery,
You think to bring this warm real struggling love
In to her of a sudden, and suppose
She 'll keep her state untroubled ? Here 's the
truth—
She 'll apprehend truth's value at a glance, 140
Prefer it to the pictured loyalty ?
You only have to say, “so men are made,
“For this they act ; the thing has many names,
“But this the right one: and now, Queen, be just!”
Your life slips back ; you lose her at the word : 145
You do not even for amends gain me.
He will not understand ; oh, Norbert, Norbert,
Do you not understand ?

IN A BALCONY

Norbert.

The Queen 's the Queen :

I am myself—no picture, but alive
In every nerve and every muscle, here 150
At the palace-window o'er the people's street,
As she in the gallery where the pictures glow :
The good of life is precious to us both.
She cannot love ; what do I want with rule ?
When first I saw your face a year ago 155
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice—
“ The woman yonder, there 's no use of life
“ But just to obtain her ! heap earth's woes in one
“ And bear them—make a pile of all earth's joys
“ And spurn them, as they help or help not this ; 160
“ Only, obtain her ! ” How was it to be ?
I found you were the cousin of the Queen ;
I must then serve the Queen to get to you.
No other way. Suppose there had been one,
And I, by saying prayers to some white star 16
With promise of my body and my soul,
Might gain you,—should I pray the star or no ?
Instead, there was the Queen to serve ! I served,
Helped, did what other servants failed to do.
Neither she sought nor I declared my end. 17
Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,—
I therefore name you as that recompense.
She dreamed that such a thing could never be ?
Let her wake now. She thinks there was more
cause

In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty ? 1
Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
Chasing such shades. Then, I 've a fancy too ;
I worked because I want you with my soul :
I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now !

Constance. Had I not loved you from the very first, 1
Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus
So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,

IN A BALCONY

You might become impatient. What 's conceived
Of us without here, by the folk within ?
Where are you now ? immersed in cares of state— 185
Where am I now ? intent on festal robes—
We two, embracing under death's spread hand !
What was this thought for, what that scruple of
yours
Which broke the council up ?—to bring about
One minute's meeting in the corridor ! 190
And then the sudden sleights, strange secrecies,
Complots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,
Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,
“ Does she know ? does she not know ? saved or
lost ? ”
A year of this compression's ecstasy 195
All goes for nothing ! you would give this up
For the old way, the open way, the world's,
His way who beats, and his who sells his wife !
What tempts you ?—their notorious happiness
Makes you ashamed of ours ? The best you 'll
gain 200
Will be—the Queen grants all that you require,
Concedes the cousin, rids herself of you
And me at once, and gives us ample leave
To live like our five hundred happy friends.
The world will show us with officious hand 205
Our chamber-entry, and stand sentinel
Where we so oft have stolen across its traps !
Get the world's warrant, ring the falcons' feet,
And make it duty to be bold and swift,
Which long ago was nature. Have it so ! 210
We never hawked by rights till flung from fist ?
Oh, the man's thought ! no woman's such a fool.
Norbert. Yes, the man's thought and my
thought, which is more—
One made to love you, let the world take note !
189

IN A BALCONY

Have I done worthy work ? be love's the praise, 215
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against
By set forms, blinded by forced secrecies !
Set free my love, and see what love can do
Shown in my life—what work will spring from that!
The world is used to have its business done 220
On other grounds, find great effects produced
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in men's
mouth.

So, good: but let my low ground shame their high!
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true !
And love 's the truth of mine. Time prove the
rest ! 225

I choose to wear you stamped all over me,
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,
That men may see, all over, you in me—
That pale loves may die out of their pretence 230
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off.
Permit this, Constance ! Love has been so long
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,
That now 't is all of me and must have way.
Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues, 235
Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,
That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,
Trembling at last to its assured result :
Then think of this revulsion ! I resume
Life after death, (it is no less than life, 240
After such long unlovely labouring days)
And liberate to beauty life's great need
O' the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,
Suppressed itself erewhile. This eve 's the time,
This eve intense with yon first trembling star 245
We seem to pant and reach ; scarce aught between
The earth that rises and the heaven that bends ;
All nature self-abandoned, every tree

IN A BALCONY

Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed, 250
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat ;
All under God, each measured by itself.
These statues round us stand abrupt, distinct,
The strong in strength, the weak in weakness
fixed,
The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre, 255
Nymph to her fawn, and Silence to her rose :
See God's approval on his universe !
Let us do so—aspire to live as these
In harmony with truth, ourselves being true !
Take the first way, and let the second come ! 260
My first is to possess myself of you ;
The music sets the march-step—forward, then !
And there 's the Queen, I go to claim you of,
The world to witness, wonder and applaud.
Our flower of life breaks open. No delay ! 265
Constance. And so shall we be ruined, both of us.
Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone :
You do not know her, were not born to it,
To feel what she can see or cannot see.
Love, she is generous,—ay, despite your smile, 270
Generous as you are : for, in that thin frame
Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with
cares,
There lived a lavish soul until it starved,
Debarred of healthy food. Look to the soul—
Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin 275
(The true man's-way) on justice and your rights,
Exactions and acquittance of the past !
Begin so—see what justice she will deal !
We women hate a debt as men a gift.
Suppose her some poor keeper of a school 280
Whose business is to sit thro' summer months
And dole out children leave to go and play,

IN A BALCONY

Herself superior to such lightness—she
In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic pomp—
To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside ; 285
We wonder such a face looks black on us ?
I do not bid you wake her tenderness,
(That were vain truly—none is left to wake)
But let her think her justice is engaged
To take the shape of tenderness, and mark 290
If she 'll not coldly pay its warmest debt !
Does she love me, I ask you ? not a whit :
Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged
To help a kinswoman, she took me up—
Did more on that bare ground than other loves 295
Would do on greater argument. For me,
I have no equivalent of such cold kind
To pay her with, but love alone to give
If I give anything. I give her love :
I feel I ought to help her, and I will. 300
So, for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice
That women hate a debt as men a gift.
If I were you, I could obtain this grace—
Could lay the whole I did to love's account,
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go— 305
Declaring my success was recompense ;
It would be so, in fact : what were it else ?
And then, once loose her generosity,—
Oh, how I see it !—then, were I but you,
To turn it, let it seem to move itself, 310
And make it offer what I really take,
Accepting just, in the poor cousin's hand,
Her value as the next thing to the Queen's—
Since none love Queens directly, none dare that,
And a thing's shadow or a name's mere echo 315
Suffices those who miss the name and thing !
You pick up just a ribbon she has worn,
To keep in proof how near her breath you came.

IN A BALCONY

Say, I 'm so near I seem a piece of her—
 Ask for me that way—(oh, you understand) 320
 You 'd find the same gift yielded with a grace,
 Which, if you make the least show to extort . . .
 —You 'll see! and when you have ruined both of us,
 Dissertate on the Queen's ingratitude!

Norbert. Then, if I turn it that way, you consent? 325
 'T is not my way; I have more hope in truth:
 Still, if you won't have truth—why, this indeed
 Were scarcely false, as I 'd express the sense.
 Will you remain here?

Constance. O best heart of mine,
 How I have loved you! then, you take my way? 330
 Are mine as you have been her minister,
 Work out my thought, give it effect for me,
 Paint plain my poor conceit and make it serve?
 I owe that withered woman everything—
 Life, fortune, you, remember! Take my part— 335
 Help me to pay her! Stand upon your rights?
 You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on you?
 Your rights are mine—you have no rights but mine.

Norbert. Remain here. How you know me!

Constance. Ah, but still——

*[He breaks from her: she remains. Dance-
 music from within.]*

Enter the QUEEN

Queen. Constance? She is here as he said.

Speak quick!

Is it so? Is it true or false? One word! 340

Constance. True.

Queen. Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee!

Constance. Madam?

Queen. I love you, Constance, from my soul.

Now say once more, with any words you will,

'T is true, all true, as true as that I speak. 345

IN A BALCONY

Constance. Why should you doubt it ?

Queen. Ah, why doubt ? why doubt ?

Dear, make me see it ! Do you see it so ?

None see themselves ; another sees them best.

You say "why doubt it ?"—you see him and me.

It is because the Mother has such grace 350

That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—

Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us ;

Yet still we let our whims prescribe despair,

Our fancies thwart and cramp our will and power, 355

And, while accepting life, abjure its use.

Constance, I had abjured the hope of love

And being loved, as truly as yon palm

The hope of seeing Egypt from that plot.

Constance. Heaven !

Queen. But it was so, Constance, it was so !

Men say—or do men say it ? fancies say— 360

"Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.

"Too late—no love for you, too late for love—

"Leave love to girls. Be queen : let Constance
love."

One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,

Ashamed at any feelings that oppose. 365

"Oh love, true, never think of love again !

"I am a queen : I rule, not love forsooth."

So it goes on ; so a face grows like this,

Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,

Till,—nay, it does not end so, I thank God ! 370

Constance. I cannot understand—

Queen. The happier you !

Constance, I know not how it is with men :

For women (I am a woman now like you)

There is no good of life but love—but love !

What else looks good, is some shade flung from love ; 375

Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,

Never you cheat yourself one instant ! Love,

IN A BALCONY

Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest !

O Constance, how I love you !

Constance. I love you.

Queen. I do believe that all is come through you. 380

I took you to my heart to keep it warm

When the last chance of love seemed dead in me ;

I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered heart.

Oh, I am very old now, am I not ?

Not so ! it is true and it shall be true ! 385

Constance. Tell it me: let me judge if true or false.

Queen. Ah, but I fear you ! you will look at me
And say, " she 's old, she 's grown unlovely quite
" Who ne'er was beauteous: men want beauty still."

Well, so I feared—the curse ! so I felt sure ! 390

Constance. Be calm. And now you feel not sure,
you say ?

Queen. Constance, he came,—the coming was
not strange—

Do not I stand and see men come and go ?

I turned a half-look from my pedestal

Where I grow marble—" one young man the more ! 395

" He will love some one ; that is nought to me :

" What would he with my marble stateliness ? "

Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore ;

The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,

And I still older, with less flesh to change— 400

We two those dear extremes that long to touch.

It seemed still harder when he first began

To labour at those state-affairs, absorbed

The old way for the old end—interest.

Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts 405

Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,

Professing they 've no care but for your cause,

Thought but to help you, love but for yourself,—

And you the marble statue all the time

IN A BALCONY

They praise and point at as preferred to life, 410
Yet leave for the first breathing woman's smile,
First dancer's, gipsy's or street baladine's !
Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men's
speech

Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,
Their gait subdued lest step should startle me, 415
Their eyes declined, such queendom to respect,
Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,
While not a man of them broke rank and spoke,
Wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand ! 420
There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

Constance. Who could have comprehended ?

Queen. Ay, who—who ? 425
Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.
Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps
It comes too late—would you but tell the truth.

Constance. I wait to tell it.

Queen. Well, you see, he came,
Outfaced the others, did a work this year 430
Exceeds in value all was ever done,
You know—it is not I who say it—all
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)
I grew aware not only of what he did,
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work 435
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake—
Souls need a finer aim to light and lure !
I felt, I saw, he loved—loved somebody.
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,
I did believe this while 't was you he loved. 440

Constance. Me, madam ?

Queen. It did seem to me, your face

IN A BALCONY

Met him where'er he looked : and whom but you
 Was such a man to love? It seemed to me,
 You saw he loved you, and approved his love,
 And both of you were in intelligence. 445
 You could not loiter in that garden, step
 Into this balcony, but I straight was stung
 And forced to understand. It seemed so true,
 So right, so beautiful, so like you both,
 That all this work should have been done by him 450
 Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,
 But that at last—suppose, some night like this—
 Borne on to claim his due reward of me,
 He might say "Give her hand and pay me so."
 And I (O Constance, you shall love me now!) 455
 I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,
 —"And he shall have it. I will make her blest,
 "My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,
 "My happiest woman's self that might have been!
 "These two shall have their joy and leave me here." 460
 Yes—yes!

Constance. Thanks!

Queen. And the word was on my lips
 When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear
 A mere calm statement of his just desire
 For payment of his labour. When—O heaven,
 How can I tell you? lightning on my eyes 465
 And thunder in my ears proved that first word
 Which told 't was love of me, of me, did all—
 He loved me—from the first step to the last,
 Loved me!

Constance. You hardly saw, scarce heard him
 speak
 Of love : what if you should mistake?

Queen. No, no— 470
 No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!
 He had not dared to hint the love he felt—

IN A BALCONY

You were my reflex—(how I understood !)
 He said you were the ribbon I had worn,
 He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes, 475
 And love, love came at end of every phrase.
 Love is begun ; this much is come to pass :
 The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours !
 I will learn, I will place my life on you,
 Teach me but how to keep what I have won ! 480
 Am I so old ? This hair was early grey ;
 But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,
 And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.
 I could sing once too ; that was in my youth.
 Still, when men paint me, they declare me . . . yes, 485
 Beautiful—-for the last French painter did !
 I know they flatter somewhat ; you are frank—
 I trust you. How I loved you from the first !
 Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out
 And set her by their side to take the eye : 490
 I must have felt that good would come from you.
 I am not generous—like him—like you !
 But he is not your lover after all :
 It was not you he looked at. Saw you him ?
 You have not been mistaking words or looks ? 495
 He said you were the reflex of myself.
 And yet he is not such a paragon
 To you, to younger women who may choose
 Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth !
 You know you never named his name to me : 500
 You know, I cannot give him up—ah God,
 Not up now, even to you !

Constance. Then calm yourself.

Queen. See, I am old—look here, you happy girl !
 I will not play the fool, deceive—ah, whom ?
 'T is all gone : put your cheek beside my cheek 505
 And what a contrast does the moon behold !
 But then I set my life upon one chance,

IN A BALCONY

The last chance and the best—am I not left,
 My soul, myself? All women love great men
 If young or old ; it is in all the tales : 510
 Young beauties love old poets who can love—
 Why should not he, the poems in my soul,
 The passionate faith, the pride of sacrifice,
 Life-long, death-long ? I throw them at his feet.
 Who cares to see the fountain's very shape, 515
 Whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's
 That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around ?
 You could not praise indeed the empty conch ;
 But I 'll pour floods of love and hide myself.
 How I will love him ! Cannot men love love ? 520
 Who was a queen and loved a poet once
 Humpbacked, a dwarf ? ah, women can do that !
 Well, but men too ; at least, they tell you so.
 They love so many women in their youth,
 And even in age they all love whom they please ; 525
 And yet the best of them confide to friends
 That 't is not beauty makes the lasting love—
 They spend a day with such and tire the next :
 They like soul,—well then, they like phantasy,
 Novelty even. Let us confess the truth, 530
 Horrible though it be, that prejudice,
 Prescription . . . curses ! they will love a queen.
 They will, they do : and will not, does not—he ?
Constance. How can he ? You are wedded : 't is
 a name
 We know, but still a bond. . Your rank remains, 535
 His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled
 As you believe and I incline to think,
 Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all ?
Queen. Hear her ! There, there now—could
 she love like me ?
 What did I say of smooth-checked youth and
 grace ? 540

IN A BALCONY

See all it does or could do ! so youth loves !
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do
What I will—you, it was not born in ! I
Will drive these difficulties far and fast
As yonder mists curdling before the moon. 545
I 'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve
My youth from its enforced calamity,
Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

Constance. You will do—dare do . . . pause on
what you say ! 550

Queen. Hear her ! I thank you, sweet, for that
surprise.

You have the fair face : for the soul, see mine !
I have the strong soul : let me teach you, 'here.
I think I have borne enough and long enough,
And patiently enough, the world remarks, 555
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.
It does so happen (I rejoice for it)

This most unhopèd-for issue cuts the knot.
There 's not a better way of settling claims
Than this ; God sends the accident express : 560
And were it for my subjects' good, no more,
'T were best thus ordered. I am thankful now,
Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,
And bless God simply, or should almost fear
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last. 565
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate !
How strong I am ! Could Norbert see me now !

Constance. Let me consider. It is all too strange.

Queen. You, Constance, learn of me ; do you,
like me !

You are young, beautiful : my own, best girl, 570
You will have many lovers, and love one—
Light hair, not hair like Norbert's, to suit yours :
Taller than he is, since yourself are tall.

IN A BALCONY

Love him, like me ! Give all away to him ;
 Think never of yourself ; throw by your pride, 575
 Hope, fear,—your own good as you saw it once,
 And love him simply for his very self.

Remember, I (and what am I to you ?)
 Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,
 Do all but just unlove him ! He loves me. 580

Constance. He shall.

Queen. You, step inside my inmost heart !
 Give me your own heart : let us have one heart !
 I 'll come to you for counsel ; “ this he says,
 “ This he does ; what should this amount to, pray ?
 “ Beseech you, change it into current coin ! 585
 “ Is that worth kisses ? Shall I please him there ? ”
 And then we 'll speak in turn of you—what else ?
 Your love, according to your beauty's worth,
 For you shall have some noble love, all gold :
 Whom choose you ? we will get him at your choice. 590
 —Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since,
 I felt as I must die or be alone

Breathing my soul into an ear like yours :
 Now, I would face the world with my new life,
 Wear my new crown. I 'll walk around the rooms, 595
 And then come back and tell you how it feels.
 How soon a smile of God can change the world !
 How we are made for happiness—how work
 Grows play, adversity a winning fight !
 True, I have lost so many years : what then ? 600
 Many remain : God has been very good.
 You, stay here ! 'T is as different from dreams,
 From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,
 As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.
 The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's
 moon ! 605

[*She goes out, leaving* CONSTANCE. *Dance-*
music from within.

IN A BALCONY

NORBERT *enters*

Norbert. Well? we have but one minute and one word!

Constance. I am yours, Norbert!

Norbert. Yes, mine.

Constance. Not till now!

You were mine. Now I give myself to you.

Norbert. Constance?

Constance. Your own! I know the thriftier way

Of giving—haply, 't is the wiser way. 610

Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole

Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,

With a new largess still at each despair)

And force you keep in sight the deed, preserve

Exhaustless till the end my part and yours, 615

My giving and your taking; both our joys

Dying together. Is it the wiser way?

I choose the simpler; I give all at once.

Know what you have to trust to, trade upon!

Use it, abuse it,—anything but think 620

Hereafter, "Had I known she loved me so,

"And what my means, I might have thriven with it."

This is your means. I give you all myself.

Norbert. I take you and thank God.

Constance. Look on through years!

We cannot kiss, a second day like this; 625

Else were this earth no earth.

Norbert. With this day's heat
We shall go on through years of cold.

Constance. So, best!

—I try to see those years—I think I see.

You walk quick and new warmth comes; you
look back

IN A BALCONY

And lay all to the first glow—not sit down 630
For ever brooding on a day like this
While seeing embers whiten and love die.
Yes, love lives best in its effect ; and mine,
Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

Norbert. Just so. I take and know you all at
once. 635

Your soul is disengaged so easily,
Your face is there, I know you ; give me time,
Let me be proud and think you shall know me.
My soul is slower : in a life I roll
The minute out whereto you condense yours— 640
The whole slow circle round you I must move,
To be just you. I look to a long life
To decompose this minute, prove its worth.
'T is the sparks' long succession one by one
Shall show you, in the end, what fire was crammed 645
In that mere stone you struck : how could you
know,

If it lay ever unproved in your sight,
As now my heart lies? your own warmth would hide
Its coldness, were it cold.

Constance. But how prove, how ?

Norbert. Prove in my life, you ask ?

Constance. Quick, Norbert—how ? 650

Norbert. That's easy told. I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.
As with the body—he who hurls a lance
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike : 655
So must I seize and task all means to prove
And show this soul of mine, you crown as yours,
And justify us both.

Constance. Could you write books,
Paint pictures ! One sits down in poverty
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich. 660

IN A BALCONY

Norbert. And loves one's painting and one's writing, then,

And not one's mistress ! All is best, believe,
And we best as no other than we are.

We live, and they experiment on life—

Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof 665

To overlook the farther. Let us be

The thing they look at ! I might take your face

And write of it and paint it—to what end ?

For whom ? what pale dictatress in the air

Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form 670

With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous
life

She makes despised for ever ? You are mine,

Made for me, not for others in the world,

Nor yet for that which I should call my art,

The cold calm power to see how fair you look. 675

I come to you ; I leave you not, to write

Or paint. You are, I am : let Rubens there

Paint us !

Constance. So, best !

Norbert.

I understand your soul.

You live, and rightly sympathize with life,

With action, power, success. This way is straight ; 680

And time were short beside, to let me change

The craft my childhood learnt : my craft shall
serve.

Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,

Manure their barren lives, and force thence fruit

First for themselves, and afterward for me 685

In the due tithe ; the task of some one soul,

Through ways of work appointed by the world.

I am not bid create—men see no star

Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—

But find and bind and bring to bear their wills. 690

So I began : to-night sees how I end.

IN A BALCONY

What if it see, too, power's first outbreak here
 Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,
 And instincts of the heart that teach the head ?
 What if the people have discerned at length 695
 The dawn of the next nature, novel brain
 Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,
 Whose work, they trust, shall find them as novel
 ways

To untried heights which yet he only sees ?
 I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen, 700
 This people—in our phrase, this mass of men—
 See how the mass lies passive to my hand
 Now that my hand is plastic, with you by
 To make the muscles iron ! Oh, an end
 Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first ! 705
 My will be on this people ! then, the strain,
 The grappling of the potter with his clay,
 The long uncertain struggle,—the success
 And consummation of the spirit-work,
 Some vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip, 710
 While rounded fair for human sense to see
 The Graces in a dance men recognize
 With turbulent applause and laughs of heart !
 So triumph ever shall renew itself ;
 Ever shall end in efforts higher yet, 715
 Ever begin . . .

Constance. I ever helping ?

Norbert. Thus !

[As he embraces her, the QUEEN enters.]

Constance. Hist, madam ! So have I performed
 my part.

You see your gratitude's true decency,
 Norbert ? A little slow in seeing it !
 Begin, to end the sooner ! What 's a kiss ? 720

Norbert. Constance ?

Constance. Why, must I teach it you again ?

IN A BALCONY

You want a witness to your dulness, sir ?
What was I saying these ten minutes long ?
Then I repeat—when some young handsome man
Like you has acted out a part like yours, 725
Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,
So very far beyond him, as he says—
So hopelessly in love that but to speak
Would prove him mad,—he thinks judiciously,
And makes some insignificant good soul, 730
Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant,
And very stalking-horse to cover him
In following after what he dares not face.
When his end 's gained—(sir, do you understand ?)
When she, he dares not face, has loved him first, 735
—May I not say so, madam ?—tops his hope,
And overpasses so his wildest dream,
With glad consent of all, and most of her
The confidant who brought the same about—
Why, in the moment when such joy explodes, 740
I do hold that the merest gentleman
Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,
Dismiss it with a “There, enough of you !”
Forget it, show his back unmannerly :
But like a liberal heart will rather turn 745
And say, “A tingling time of hope was ours ;
“Betwixt the fears and falterings, we two lived
“A chanceful time in waiting for the prize :
“The confidant, the Constance, served not ill.
“And though I shall forget her in due time, 750
“Her use being answered now, as reason bids,
“Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts,—
“Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,
“The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,
“And the first—which is the last—rewarding kiss.” 755
Norbert. Constance, it is a dream—ah, see, you
smile !

IN A BALCONY

Constance. So, now his part being properly performed,

Madam, I turn to you and finish mine
As duly ; I do justice in my turn.
Yes, madam, he has loved you—long and well ; 760
He could not hope to tell you so—'t was I
Who served to prove your soul accessible,
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place
When they had wandered else into despair,
And kept love constant toward its natural aim. 765
Enough, my part is played ; you stoop half-way
And meet us royally and spare our fears :
'T is like yourself. He thanks you, so do I.
Take him—with my full heart ! my work is praised
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both ! 770
Yourself—the only one on earth who can—
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart
Which though warm is not useful in its warmth
As the silk vesture of a queen ! fold that
Around him gently, tenderly. For him— 775
For him,—he knows his own part !

Norbert. Have you done ?

I take the jest at last. Should I speak now ?
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,
Or did you but accept it ? Well—at least
You lose by it.

Constance. Nay, madam, 't is your turn ! 780
Restrain him still from speech a little more,
And make him happier as more confident !
Pity him, madam, he is timid yet !
Mark, Norbert ! Do not shrink now ! Here I
yield

My whole right in you to the Queen, observe ! 785
With her go put in practice the great schemes
You teem with, follow the career else closed—
Be all you cannot be except by her !

IN A BALCONY

Behold her !—Madam, say for pity's sake
 Anything—frankly say you love him ! Else 790
 He 'll not believe it : there 's more earnest in
 His fear than you conceive : I know the man !

Norbert. I know the woman somewhat, and confess

I thought she had jested better : she begins
 To overcharge her part. I gravely wait 795
 Your pleasure, madam : where is my reward ?

Queen. Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognize
 Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,
 Eccentric speech and variable mirth,
 Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold, 800
 Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)
 —May still be right : I may do well to speak
 And make authentic what appears a dream
 To even myself. For, what she says, is true :
 Yes, Norbert—what you spoke just now of love, 805
 Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,
 But justified a warmth felt long before.
 Yes, from the first—I loved you, I shall say :
 Strange ! but I do grow stronger, now 't is said.
 Your courage helps mine : you did well to speak 810
 To-night, the night that crowns your twelve-
 months' toil :

But still I had not waited to discern
 Your heart so long, believe me ! From the first
 The source of so much zeal was almost plain,
 In absence even of your own words just now 815
 Which hazarded the truth. 'T is very strange,
 But takes a happy ending—in your love
 Which mine meets : be it so ! as you chose me,
 So I choose you.

Norbert. And worthily you choose.
 I will not be unworthy your esteem, 820
 No, madam. I do love you ; I will meet

IN A BALCONY

Your nature, now I know it. This was well.
 I see,—you dare and you are justified :
 But none had ventured such experiment,
 Less versed than you in nobleness of heart, 825
 Less confident of finding such in me.
 I joy that thus you test me ere you grant
 The dearest richest beauteousest and best
 Of women to my arms : 't is like yourself.
 So—back again into my part's set words— 830
 Devotion to the uttermost is yours,
 But no, you cannot, madam, even you,
 Create in me the love our Constance does.
 Or—something truer to the tragic phrase—
 Not you magnolia-bell superb with scent 835
 Invites a certain insect—that 's myself—
 But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground.
 I take this lady.

Constance. Stay—not hers, the trap—
 Stay, Norbert—that mistake were worst of all !
 He is too cunning, madam ! It was I, 840
 I, Norbert, who . . .

Norbert. You, was it, Constance ? Then,
 But for the grace of this divinest hour
 Which gives me you, I might not pardon here !
 I am the Queen's ; she only knows my brain :
 She may experiment upon my heart 845
 And I instruct her too by the result.
 But you, sweet, you who know me, who so long
 Have told my heart-beats over, held my life
 In those white hands of yours,—it is not well !

Constance. Tush ! I have said it, did I not say
 it all ? 850
 The life, for her—the heart-beats, for her sake !

Norbert. Enough ! my cheek grows red, I think.
 Your test ?

There 's not the meanest woman in the world,

IN A BALCONY

Not she I least could love in all the world,
Whom, did she love me, had love proved itself, 855
I dare insult as you insult me now.

Constance, I could say, if it must be said,
"Take back the soul you offer, I keep mine!"
But—"Take the soul still quivering on your hand,
"The soul so offered, which I cannot use, 860
"And, please you, give it to some playful friend,
"For—what 's the trifle he requites me with?"

I, tempt a woman, to amuse a man,
That two may mock her heart if it succumb?
No: fearing God and standing 'neath his heaven, 865
I would not dare insult a woman so,
Were she the meanest woman in the world,
And he, I cared to please, ten emperors!

Constance. Norbert!

Norbert. I love once as I live but once.

What case is this to think or talk about? 870

I love you. Would it mend the case at all

If such a step as this killed love in me?

Your part were done: account to God for it!

But mine—could murdered love get up again,
And kneel to whom you please to designate, 875
And make you mirth? It is too horrible.

You did not know this, Constance? now you know

That body and soul have each one life, but one:

And here 's my love, here, living, at your feet.

Constance. See the Queen! Norbert—this one
more last word— 880

If thus you have taken jest for earnest—thus
Loved me in earnest . . .

Norbert. Ah, no jest holds here!

Where is the laughter in which jests break up,

And what this horror that grows palpable?

Madam—why grasp you thus the balcony? 885

Have I done ill? Have I not spoken truth?

IN A BALCONY

How could I other? Was it not your test,
To try me, what my love for Constance meant?
Madam, your royal soul itself approves,
The first, that I should choose thus! so one takes 890
A beggar,—asks him, what would buy his child?
And then approves the expected laugh of scorn
Returned as something noble from the rags.
Speak, Constance, I'm the beggar! Ha, what's
this?

You two glare each at each like panthers now. 895
Constance, the world fades; only you stand there!
You did not, in to-night's wild whirl of things,
Sell me—your soul of souls, for any price?
No—no—'t is easy to believe in you!
Was it your love's mad trial to o'ertop 900
Mine by this vain self-sacrifice? well, still—
Though I might curse, I love you. I am love
And cannot change : love's self is at your feet !

[*The QUEEN goes out.*]

Constance. Feel my heart; let it die against
your own !

Norbert. Against my own. Explain not; let
this be ! 905

This is life's height.

Constance. Yours, yours, yours !

Norbert. You and I—

Why care by what meanders we are here
I' the centre of the labyrinth? Men have died
Trying to find this place, which we have found.

Constance. Found, found !

Norbert. Sweet, never fear
what she can do ! 910

We are past harm now.

Constance. On the breast of God.

I thought of men—as if you were a man.
Tempting him with a crown !

IN A BALCONY

Norbert. This must end here :
It is too perfect.

Constance. There 's the music stopped.
What measured heavy tread ? It is one blaze 915
About me and within me.

Norbert. Oh, some death
Will run its sudden finger round this spark
And sever us from the rest !

Constance. And so do well.
Now the doors open.

Norbert. 'T is the guard comes.

Constance. Kiss !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

1864

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

I.—JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW

I

AH, Love, but a day
And the world has changed !
The sun 's away,
And the bird estranged ;
The wind has dropped, 5
And the sky 's deranged :
Summer has stopped.

II

Look in my eyes !
Wilt thou change too ?
Should I fear surprise ? 10
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true,
With the changing year ?

.III

Thou art a man,
But I am thy love. 15
For the lake, its swan ;
For the dell, its dove ;
And for thee—(oh, haste !)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced. 20

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

II.—BY THE FIRESIDE

I

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,
Oak and pine?
Oh, for the ills half-understood,
The dim dead woe
Long ago
Befallen this bitter coast of France!
Well, poor sailors took their chance;
I take mine.

II

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot
O'er the sea :
Do sailors eye the casement—mute,
Drenched and stark,
From their bark—
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate
O' the warm safe house and happy freight
—Thee and me ?

III

God help you, sailors, at your need !
Spare the curse !
For some ships, safe in port indeed, 40
Rot and rust,
Run to dust,
All through worms i' the wood, which crept,
Gnawed our hearts out while we slept :
That is worse. 45

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

IV

Who lived here before us two ?
 Old-world pairs.
Did a woman ever—would I knew !—
 Watch the man
 With whom began
Love's voyage full-sail,—(now, gnash your teeth !)
When planks start, open hell beneath
 Unawares ? 50

III.—IN THE DOORWAY

I

The swallow has set her six young on the rail,
 And looks sea-ward :
The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale 55
 To the leeward,—
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with
 the wind.
“ Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind, ”—
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail ! 60

II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
 Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
 Where there lingers
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake : 65
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on
 its stake !
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

III

Yet here are we two; we have love, house enough,
 With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and rough, 7
 Though it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent;
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;
And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

IV

But why must cold spread? but wherefore bring
 change 7:
 To the spirit,
God meant should mate his with an infinite range,
 And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold! 80
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter
 estrangle!

IV.—ALONG THE BEACH

I

I will be quiet and talk with you,
 And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love—is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do: 85
 What has come of it all along?

II

I took you—how could I otherwise?
 For a world to me, and more;
For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God's a-glow, to the loving eyes, 90
 In what was mere earth before.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

III

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth !
Now do I mis-state, mistake ?
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth ?
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth, 95
Seal my sense up for your sake ?

IV

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love ! not so, indeed !
You were just weak earth, I knew :
With much in you waste, with many a weed,
And plenty of passions run to seed, 100
But a little good grain too.

V

And such as you were, I took you for mine :
Did not you find me yours,
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine 105
Would flow, as the Book assures ?

VI

Well, and if none of these good things came,
What did the failure prove ?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame, 110
And, either or both, to love.

VII

Yet this turns now to a fault—there ! there !
That I do love, watch too long,
And wait too well, and weary and wear ;
And 't is all an old story, and my despair 115
Fit subject for some new song :

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

VIII

"How the light, light love, he has wings to fly
"At suspicion of a bond :
"My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,
"Which will turn up next in a laughing eye, 120
"And why should you look beyond ?"

V.—ON THE CLIFF

I

I leaned on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf ;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock : 125
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

II

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face :
No iron like that ! 130
Baked dry ; of a weed, of a shell, no trace :
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue, 135
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

IV

On the rock, they scorch 140
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly :
No turf, no rock : in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red ! 145

V

Is it not so
With the minds of men ?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves ; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,— 150
Love settling unawares !

VI.—READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF

I

“ Still ailing, Wind ? Wilt be appeased or no ?
“ Which needs the other's office, thou or I ?
“ Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,
“ And can, in truth, my voice untie 155
“ Its links, and let it go ?

II

“ Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would be
righted,
“ Entrusting thus thy cause to me ? Forbear !
“ No tongue can mend such pleadings ; faith,
requited
“ With falsehood,—love, at last aware 160
“ Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

III

- "We have them ; but I know not any tone
"So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow :
"Dost think men would go mad without a moan,
"If they knew any way to borrow 165
"A pathos like thy own ?

IV

- "Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs?
The one
"So long escaping from lips starved and blue,
"That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
"Stretches her length ; her foot comes through 170
"The straw she shivers on ;

V

- "You had not thought she was so tall : and spent,
"Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut
"Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent
"The clammy palm ; then all is mute : 175
"That way, the spirit went.

VI

- "Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
"Thy will to help me ?—like the dog I found
"Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
"Who would not take my food, poor hound, 180
"But whined and licked my hand."

VII

- All this, and more, comes from some young man's
pride
Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—
Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried :

185

VIII

Instances he must—simply recognize ?
Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's zeal,
Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

190

IX

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest !
Himself the undefeated that shall be :
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—
His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest !

195

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind
Means in its moaning—by the happy prompt
Instinctive way of youth, I mean ; for kind
Calm years, exacting their accout
Of pain, mature the mind :

XI

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
Just about daybreak, as he looks across
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul,—

205

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XII

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
“Here is the change beginning, here the lines
“Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss 210
“The limit time assigns.”

XIII

Nothing can be as it has been before;
Better, so call it, only not the same.
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,
And keep it changeless! such our claim; 215
So answered,—Never more!

XIV

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly, 220
His soul's wings never furled!

XV

That's a new question; still replies the fact,
Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;
We moan in acquiescence: there's life's pact,
Perhaps probation—do I know? 225
God does: endure his act!

XVI

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise
thing
Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;
While time first washes—ah, the sting!— 230
O'er all he'd sink to save.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS

I

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning ! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth ; 235
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

II

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true ;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love, 240
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you :
Make the low nature better by your throes !
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above !

VIII.—BESIDE THE DRAWING BOARD

I

“ As like as a Hand to another Hand ! ”
Whoever said that foolish thing, 245
Could not have studied to understand
The counsels of God in fashioning,
Out of the infinite love of his heart,
This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart
From the world of wonder left to praise, 250
If I tried to learn the other ways
Of love in its skill, or love in its power.
“ As like as a Hand to another Hand ” :
Who said that, never took his stand,
Found and followed, like me, an hour, 255
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear, almost,—of the limit-line !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

As I looked at this, and learned and drew,
Drew and learned, and looked again,
While fast the happy minutes flew, 260
Its beauty mounted into my brain,
And a fancy seized me ; I was fain
To efface my work, begin anew,
Kiss what before I only drew ;
Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips, 265
With soul to help if the mere lips failed,
I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,
Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips
Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

II

'T is a clay cast, the perfect thing, 270
From Hand live once, dead long ago :
Princess-like it wears the ring
To fancy's eye, by which we know
That here at length a master found
His match, a proud lone soul its mate, 275
As soaring genius sank to ground,
And pencil could not emulate
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear almost !—of the limit-line.
Long ago the god, like me 280
The worm, learned, each in our degree :
Looked and loved, learned and drew,
Drew and learned and loved again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
Till beauty mounted into his brain 285
And on the finger which outvied
His art he placed the ring that 's there,
Still by fancy's eye descried,
In token of a marriage rare :
For him on earth, his art's despair, 290
For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

III

Little girl with the poor coarse hand
I turned from to a cold clay cast—
I have my lesson, understand
The worth of flesh and blood at last. 295
Nothing but beauty in a Hand?
Because he could not change the hue,
Mend the lines and make them true
To this which met his soul's demand,—
Would Da Vinci turn from you? 300
I hear him laugh my woes to scorn—
“The fool forsooth is all forlorn
“Because the beauty, she thinks best,
“Lived long ago or was never born,—
“Because no beauty bears the test 305
“In this rough peasant Hand! Confessed!
“‘Art is null and study void!’
“So sayest thou? So said not I,
“Who threw the faulty pencil by,
“And years instead of hours employed, 310
“Learning the veritable use
“Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath
“Lines and hue of the outer sheath,
“If haply I might reproduce
“One motive of the powers profuse, 315
“Flesh and bone and nerve that make
“The poorest coarsest human hand
“An object worthy to be scanned
“A whole life long for their sole sake.
“Shall earth and the cramped moment-space 320
“Yield the heavenly crowning grace?
“Now the parts and then the whole!
“Who art thou, with stunted soul
“And stunted body, thus to cry
“‘I love,—shall that be life's strait dole? 325
“‘I must live beloved or die!’

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"This peasant hand that spins the wool
"And bakes the bread, why lives it on,
"Poor and coarse with beauty gone,—
"What use survives the beauty?" Fool! 330

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand!
I have my lesson, shall understand.

IX.—ON DECK

I

There is nothing to remember in me,
Nothing I ever said with a grace,
Nothing I did that you care to see, 335
Nothing I was that deserves a place '
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

II

Conceded! In turn, concede to me,
Such things have been as a mutual flame.
Your soul 's locked fast; but, love for a key, 340
You might let it loose, till I grew the same
In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange plea!

III

For then, then, what would it matter to me,
That I was the harsh ill-favoured one?
We both should be like as pea and pea; 345
It was ever so since the world begun:
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

IV

How strange it were if you had all me,
As I have all you in my heart and brain,
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee, 350
Who never lifted the hand in vain—
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea!

JAMES LEE'S WIFE

V

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
Rose like your own face present now,
With eyes as dear in their due degree, 355
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,
Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'T is She!"

VI

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love ;
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree, 360
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

VII

But did one touch of such love for me
Come in a word or a look of yours,
Whose words and looks will, circling, flee, 365
Round me and round while life endures,—
Could I fancy "As I feel, thus feels he" ;

VIII

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,
Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,— 370
You might turn myself!—should I know or care
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

GOLD HAIR

A STORY OF PORNIC

I

OH, the beautiful girl, too white,
Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,
Just where the sea and the Loire unite !
And a boasted name in Brittany
She bore, which I will not write.

5

II

Too white, for the flower of life is red ;
Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen
Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)
To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
And blossom in heaven instead.

10

III

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair !
One grace that grew to its full on earth :
Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,
And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
But she had her great gold hair.

15

IV

Hair, such a wonder of flax and floss,
Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too !
Gold, did I say ? Nay, gold 's mere dross :
Here, Life smiled, " Think what I meant to
do !"
And Love sighed, " Fancy my loss !"

20

GOLD HAIR: A STORY OF PORNIC

V

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange
Than that, when delicate evening dies,
And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,
There's a shoot of colour startles the skies
With sudden, violent change,—

25

VI

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,
As they put the little cross to her lips,
She changed; a spot came out on her cheek,
A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,
And she broke forth, "I must speak!"

30

VII

"Not my hair!" made the girl her moan—
"All the rest is gone or to go;
"But the last, last grace, my all, my own,
"Let it stay in the grave, that the ghosts may
know!
"Leave my poor gold hair alone!"

35

VIII

The passion thus vented, dead lay she;
Her parents sobbed their worst on that;
All friends joined in, nor observed degree:
For indeed the hair was to wonder at,
As it spread—not flowing free,

40

IX

But curled around her brow, like a crown,
And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,
And calmed about her neck—ay, down
To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap
I' the gold, it reached her gown.

45

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

X

All kissed that face, like a silver wedge
'Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair :
E'en the priest allowed death's privilege,
As he planted the crucifix with care
On her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

50

XI

And thus was she buried, inviolate
Of body and soul, in the very space
By the altar ; keeping saintly state
In Pornic church, for her pride of race,
Pure life and piteous fate.

55

XII

And in after-time would your fresh tear fall,
Though your mouth might twitch with a dubi-
ous smile,
As they told you of gold, both robe and pall,
How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,
So it never was touched at all.

60

XIII

Years flew ; this legend grew at last
The life of the lady ; all she had done,
All been, in the memories fading fast
Of lover and friend, was summed in one
Sentence survivors passed :

65

XIV

To wit, she was meant for heaven, not earth ;
Had turned an angel before the time :
Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth
Of frailty, all you could count a crime
Was—she knew her gold hair's worth.

70

GOLD HAIR: A STORY OF PORNIC

XV

At little pleasant Pornic church,
It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,
Was taken to pieces : left in the lurch,
A certain sacred space lay bare,
And the boys began research. 75

XVI

'T was the space where our sires would lay a
saint,
A benefactor,—a bishop, suppose,
A baron with armour-adornments quaint,
Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,
Things sanctity saves from taint ; 80

XVII

So we come to find them in after-days
When the corpse is presumed to have done
with gauds
Of use to the living, in many ways :
For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,
And the church deserves the praise. 85

XVIII

They grubbed with a will : and at length—*O cor*
Humanum, pectora cæca, and the rest !—
They found—no gaud they were prying for,
No ring, no rose, but—who would have
guessed ?—
A double Louis-d'or ! 90

XIX

Here was a case for the priest : he heard,
Marked, inwardly digested, laid
Finger on nose, smiled, "There 's a bird
"Chirps in my ear" : then, "Bring a spade,
Dig deeper !"—he gave the word. 95

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XX

And lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,
Or rotten planks which composed it once,
Why, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid
A mint of money, it served for the nonce
To hold in its hair-heaps hid ! 100

XXI

Hid there? Why? Could the girl be wont
(She the stainless soul) to treasure up
Money, earth's trash and heaven's affront?
Had a spider found out the communion-cup,
Was a toad in the christening-font? 105

XXII

Truth is truth : too true it was.
Gold ! She hoarded and hugged it first,
Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it—alas—
Till the humour grew to a head and burst,
And she cried, at the final pass,— 110

XXIII

"Talk not of God, my heart is stone !
"Nor lover nor friend—be gold for both !
"Gold I lack ; and, my all, my own,
"It shall hide in my hair. I scarce die loth
"If they let my hair alone !" 115

XXIV

Louis-d'or, some six times five,
And duly double, every piece.
Now do you see? With the priest to shrive,
With parents preventing her soul's release
By kisses that kept alive,— 120

GOLD HAIR: A STORY OF PORNIC

XXV

With heaven's gold gates about to ope,
With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
For gold, the true sort—"Gold in heaven, if
you will ;
"But I keep earth's too, I hope." 125

XXVI

Enough! The priest took the grave's grim yield :
The parents, they eyed that price of sin
As if *thirty pieces* lay revealed
On the place to *bury strangers in*,
The hideous Potter's Field. 130

XXVII

But the priest bethought him: "'Milk that's spilt'
"—You know the adage! Watch and pray!
"Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!
"It would build a new altar; that, we may!"
And the altar therewith was built. 135

XXVIII

Why I deliver this horrible verse?
As the text of a sermon, which now I preach :
Evil or good may be better or worse
In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse. 140

XXIX

The candid incline to surmise of late
That the Christian faith proves false, I find ;
For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate
Begins to tell on the public mind,
And Colenso's words have weight : 145

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XXX

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
See reasons and reasons ; this, to begin :
'T is the faith that launched point-blank her dart
At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart. 150

THE WORST OF IT

I

WOULD it were I had been false, not you !
I that am nothing, not you that are all :
I, never the worse for a touch or two
On my speckled hide ; not you, the pride
Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall 5
On her wonder of white must unswan, undo !

II

I had dipped in life's struggle and, out again,
Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,
When I found my swan and the cure was plain ;
The dull turned bright as I caught your white 10
On my bosom : you saved me—saved in vain
If you ruined yourself, and all through me !

III

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,
Who taught you to stoop ; you gave me your-
self,
And bound your soul by the vows that damn : 15
Since on better thought you break, as you ought,
Vows—words, no angel set down, some elf
Mistook,—for an oath, an epigram !

IV

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,
And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased ! 20
I choose to be yours, for my proper part,
Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make ;

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

If I acquiesce, why should you be teased
With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart ?

V

But what will God say ? Oh, my sweet, 25
Think, and be sorry you did this thing
Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,
There 's a heaven above may deserve your
love :
Should you forfeit heaven for a snapt gold ring
And a promise broke, were it just or meet ? 30

VI

And I to have tempted you ! I, who tired
Your soul, no doubt, till it sank ! Unwise,
I loved and was lowly, loved and aspired,
Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,
And you meant to have hated and despised— 35
Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired !

VII

She, ruined ? How ? No heaven for her ?
Crowns to give, and none for the brow
That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh ?
Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch
borne, 40
And she go graceless, she graced now
Beyond all saints, as themselves aver ?

VIII

Hardly ! That must be understood !
The earth is your place of penance, then ;
And what will it prove ? I desire your good, 45
But, plot as I may, I can find no way
How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,
Nor prove too much for your womanhood.

THE WORST OF IT

IX

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,
When you walk alone, and review the past ; 50
And I, who so long shall have done with strife,
And journeyed my stage and earned my wage
And retired as was right,—I am called at last
When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

X

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong, 55
Nor the other hours are able to save,
The happy, that lasted my whole life long :
For a promise broke, not for first words spoke
The true, the only, that turn my grave
To a blaze of joy and a crash of song. 60

XI

Witness beforehand ! Off I trip
On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung :
My very name made great by your lip,
And my heart a-glow with the good I know
Of a perfect year when we both were young, 65
And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

XII

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait !
I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots !
It may be for yourself, when you meditate,
That you grieve—for slain ruth, murdered truth. 70
“ Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots ?
“ How truth would have triumphed ! ”—you sigh
too late.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XIII

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say !
Well, it is lost now ; well, you must bear,
Abide and grow fit for a better day : 75
You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge !
But hush ! For you, can be no despair :
There 's amends : 't is a secret : hope and pray !

XIV

For I was true at least—oh, true enough !
And, Dear, truth is not as good as it seems ! 80
Commend me to conscience ! Idle stuff !
Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,
And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams
At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

XV

Men tell me of truth now—" False !" I cry : 85
Of beauty—" A mask, friend ! Look beneath !"
We take our own method, the devil and I,
With pleasant and fair and wise and rare :
And the best we wish to what lives, is—death ;
Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie ! 90

XVI

Far better commit a fault and have done—
As you, Dear !—for ever ; and choose the pure,
And look where the healing waters run,
And strive and strain to be good again,
And a place in the other world ensure, 95
All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

THE WORST OF IT

XVII

Misery ! What shall I say or do ?

I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade :

Most like, you are glad you deceived me—rue

No whit of the wrong : you endured too long, 100

Have done no evil and want no aid,

Will live the old life out and chance the new.

XVIII

And your sentence is written all the same,

And I can do nothing,—pray, perhaps :

But somehow the world pursues its game,— 105

If I pray, if I curse,—for better or worse :

And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,

And my heart feels ice while my words breathe
flame.

XIX

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.

Are you still so fair ? Have you still the eyes ? 110

Be happy ! Add but the other grace,

Be good ! Why want what the angels vaunt ?

I knew you once : but in Paradise,

If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

DÎS ALITER VISUM ; OR, LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS

I

STOP, let me have the truth of that !
Is that all true ? I say, the day
Ten years ago when both of us
Met on a morning, friends—as thus
We meet this evening, friends or what ?— 5

II

Did you—because I took your arm
And sillily smiled, “ A mass of brass
“ That sea looks, blazing underneath ! ”
While up the cliff-road edged with heath,
We took the turns nor came to harm— 10

III

Did you consider “ Now makes twice
“ That I have seen her, walked and talked
“ With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,
“ Whose worth I weigh : she tries to sing ;
“ Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice ; 15

IV

“ Reads verse and thinks she understands ;
“ Loves all, at any rate, that 's great,
“ Good, beautiful ; but much as we
“ Down at the bath-house love the sea,
“ Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands : 20

DÏS ALITER VISUM

V

"While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull
"That flaps and floats from wave to cave !
"There 's the sea-lover, fair my friend !
"What then ? Be patient, mark and mend !
"Had you the making of your scull ?" 25

VI

And did you, when we faced the church
With spire and sad slate roof, aloof
From human fellowship so far,
Where a few graveyard crosses are,
And garlands for the swallows' perch,— 30

VII

Did you determine, as we stepped
O'er the lone stone fence, "Let me get
"Her for myself, and what 's the earth
"With all its art, verse, music, worth—
"Compared with love, found, gained, and kept ? 35

VIII

"Schumann 's our music-maker now ;
"Has his march-movement youth and mouth ?
"Ingres 's the modern man that paints ;
"Which will lean on me, of his saints ?
"Heine for songs ; for kisses, how ?" 40

IX

And did you, when we entered, reached
The votive frigate, soft aloft
Riding on air this hundred years,
Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—
Did you draw profit while she preached ? 45

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

X

Resolving, "Fools we wise men grow !
"Yes, I could easily blurt out curt
"Some question that might find reply
"As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,
"And rush of red to cheek and brow : 50

XI

"Thus were a match made, sure and fast,
"Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound
"Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay
"For one more look at baths and bay,
"Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last— 55

XII

"A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,
"Famous, however, for verse and worse,
"Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair
"When gout and glory seat me there,
"So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,— 60

XIII

"And this young beauty, round and sound
"As a mountain-apple, youth and truth
"With loves and doves, at all events
"With money in the Three per Cents ;
"Whose choice of me would seem profound :— 65

XIV

"She might take me as I take her.
"Perfect the hour would pass, alas !
"Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,
"Feet, feelings, must descend the hill :
"An hour's perfection can't recur. 70

DÏS ALITER VISUM

XV

- “ Then follows Paris and full time
“ For both to reason : ‘ Thus with us !’
“ She ’ll sigh, ‘ Thus girls give body and soul
“ ‘ At first word, think they gain the goal,
“ ‘ When ’t is the starting-place they climb ! 75

XVI

- “ ‘ My friend makes verse and gets renown ;
“ ‘ Have they all fifty years, his peers ?
“ ‘ He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay ;
“ ‘ Boys will become as much one day :
“ ‘ They’re fools; he cheats, with beard less brown. 80

XVII

- “ ‘ For boys say, *Love me or I die !*
“ ‘ He did not say, *The truth is, youth*
“ ‘ *I want, who am old and know too much ;*
“ ‘ *I’d catch youth : lend me sight and touch !*
“ ‘ *Drop heart’s blood where life’s wheels grate dry !* 85

XVIII

- “ While I should make rejoinder ”—(then
It was, no doubt, you ceased that least
Light pressure of my arm in yours)
“ ‘ I can conceive of cheaper cures
“ ‘ For a yawning-fit o’er books and men. 90

XIX

- “ ‘ What? All I am, was, and might be,
“ ‘ All, books taught, art brought, life’s whole
strife,
“ ‘ Painful results since precious, just
“ ‘ Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,
“ ‘ For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea ? 95

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XX

“ ‘All for a nosegay !—what came first ;
“ ‘With fields on flower, untried each side ;
“ ‘I rally, need my books and men,
“ ‘And find a nosegay ’ : drop it, then,
“ No match yet made for best or worst ! ”

100

XXI

That ended me. You judged the porch
We left by, Norman ; took our look
At sea and sky ; wondered so few
Find out the place for air and view ;
Remarked the sun began to scorch ;

105

XXII

Descended, soon regained the baths,
And then, good-bye ! Years ten since then :
Ten years ! We meet : you tell me, now,
By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,
On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

110

XXIII

Now I may speak : you fool, for all
Your lore ! Who made things plain in vain ?
What was the sea for ? What, the grey
Sad church, that solitary day,
Crosses and graves and swallows' call ?

115

XXIV

Was there nought better than to enjoy ?
No feat which, done, would make time break,
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity, our due ?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ ?

120

DĪS ALITER VISUM

XXV

No wise beginning, here and now,
What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)
And heaven must finish, there and then ?
No tasting earth's true food for men,
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet ?

125

XXVI

No grasping at love, gaining a share
O' the sole spark from God's life at strife
With death, so, sure of range above
The limits here ? For us and love,
Failure ; but, when God fails, despair.

130

XXVII

This you call wisdom ? Thus you add
Good unto good again, in vain ?
You loved, with body worn and weak ;
I loved, with faculties to seek :
Were both loves worthless since ill-clad ?

135

XXVIII

Let the mere star-fish in his vault
Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips :
He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
Man, found with either in default.

140

XXIX

But what 's whole, can increase no more,
Is dwarfed and dies, since here 's its sphere.
The devil laughed at you in his sleeve !
You knew not ? That I well believe ;
Or you had saved two souls : nay, four.

145

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

xxx

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?
At any rate she danced, all say,
Vilely ; her vogue has had its day.
Here comes my husband from his whist.

150

TOO LATE

I

HERE was I with my arm and heart
And brain, all yours for a word, a want
Put into a look—just a look, your part,—
While mine, to repay it . . . vainest vaunt,
Were the woman, that 's dead, alive to hear, 5
Had her lover, that 's lost, love's proof to show!
But I cannot show it ; you cannot speak
From the churchyard neither, miles removed,
Though I feel by a pulse within my cheek,
Which stabs and stops, that the woman I loved 10
Needs help in her grave and finds none near,
Wants warmth from the heart which sends it—so!

II

Did I speak once angrily, all the drear days
You lived, you woman I loved so well,
Who married the other ? Blame or praise, 15
Where was the use then ? Time would tell,
And the end declare what man for you,
What woman for me, was the choice of God.
But, Edith dead ! no doubting more !
I used to sit and look at my life 20
As it rippled and ran till, right before,
A great stone stopped it : oh, the strife
Of waves at the stone some devil threw
In my life's midcurrent, thwarting God !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

III

But either I thought, "They may churn and chide" 25
 "Awhile, my waves which came for their joy
"And found this horrible stone full-tide :
 "Yet I see just a thread escape, deploy
"Through the evening-country, silent and safe,
 "And it suffers no more till it finds the sea." 30
Or else I would think, "Perhaps some night
 "When new things happen, a meteor-ball
"May slip through the sky in a line of light,
 "And earth breathe hard, and landmarks fall,
"And my waves no longer champ nor chafe, 35
 "Since a stone will have rolled from its place :
 let be !"

IV

But, dead ! All 's done with : wait who may,
 Watch and wear and wonder who will.
Oh, my whole life that ends to-day !
 Oh, my soul's sentence, sounding still, 40
"The woman is dead that was none of his ;
 "And the man that was none of hers may go !"
There 's only the past left : worry that !
 Wreak, like a bull, on the empty coat,
Rage, its late wearer is laughing at ! 45
 Tear the collar to rags, having missed his throat ;
Strike stupidly on—"This, this and this,
 "Where I would that a bosom received the
 blow !"

V

I ought to have done more : once my speech,
 And once your answer, and there, the end, 50
And Edith was henceforth out of reach !
 Why, men do more to deserve a friend,

TOO LATE

Be rid of a foe, get rich, grow wise,
Nor, folding their arms, stare fate in the face.
Why, better even have burst like a thief 55
And borne you away to a rock for us two,
In a moment's horror, bright, bloody and brief :
Then changed to myself again—"I slew
"Myself in that moment ; a ruffian lies
"Somewhere : your slave, see, born in his place!" 60

VI

What did the other do? You be judge !
Look at us, Edith ! Here are we both !
Give him his six whole years : I grudge
None of the life with you, nay, loathe
Myself that I grudged his start in advance 65
Of me who could overtake and pass.
But, as if he loved you ! No, not he,
Nor anyone else in the world, 't is plain :
Who ever heard that another, free
As I, young, prosperous, sound and sane, 70
Poured life out, proffered it—"Half a glance
"Of those eyes of yours and I drop the glass !"

VII

Handsome, were you? 'T is more than they held,
More than they said ; I was 'ware and watched :
I was the 'scapegrace, this rat belled 75
The cat, this fool got his whiskers scratched :
The others? No head that was turned, no heart
Broken, my lady, assure yourself !
Each soon made his mind up ; so and so
Married a dancer, such and such 80
Stole his friend's wife, stagnated slow,
Or maundered, unable to do as much,
And muttered of peace where he had no part :
While, hid in the closet, laid on the shelf,—

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

VIII

On the whole, you were let alone, I think ! 85
So, you looked to the other, who acquiesced ;
My rival, the proud man,—prize your pink
Of poets ! A poet he was ! I 've guessed :
He rhymed you his rubbish nobody read,
Loved you and doted you—did not I laugh ! 90
There was a prize ! But we both were tried.
Oh, heart of mine, marked broad with her mark,
Tekel, found wanting, set aside,
Scorned ! See, I bleed these tears in the dark
Till comfort come and the last be bled : 95
He ? He is tagging your epitaph.

IX

If it would only come over again !
—Time to be patient with me, and probe
This heart till you punctured the proper vein,
Just to learn what blood is : twitch the robe 100
From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped,
Prick the leathern heart till the—verses spirt !
And late it was easy ; late, you walked
Where a friend might meet you ; Edith's name
Arose to one's lip if one laughed or talked ; 105
If I heard good news, you heard the same ;
When I woke, I knew that your breath escaped ;
I could bide my time, keep alive, alert.

X

And alive I shall keep and long, you will see !
I knew a man, was kicked like a dog 110
From gutter to cesspool ; what cared he
So long as he picked from the filth his prog ?
He saw youth, beauty and genius die,
And jollily lived to his hundredth year.

TOO LATE

But I will live otherwise : none of such life ! 115
At once I begin as I mean to end.
Go on with the world, get gold in its strife,
Give your spouse the slip and betray your friend !
There are two who decline, a woman and I,
And enjoy our death in the darkness here. 120

XI

I liked that way you had with your curls
Wound to a ball in a net behind :
Your cheek was chaste as a quaker-girl's,
And your mouth—there was never, to my mind,
Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut ; 125
And the dented chin too—what a chin !
There were certain ways when you spoke, some words
That you know you never could pronounce :
You were thin, however ; like a bird's
Your hand seemed—some would say, the pounce 130
Of a scaly-footed hawk—all but !
The world was right when it called you thin.

XII

But I turn my back on the world : I take
Your hand, and kneel, and lay to my lips.,
Bid me live, Edith ! Let me slake 135
Thirst at your presence ! Fear no slips :
'T is your slave shall pay, while his soul endures,
Full due, love's whole debt, *summum jus*.
My queen shall have high observance, planned
Courtship made perfect, no least line 140
Crossed without warrant. There you stand,
Warm too, and white too : would this wine
Had washed all over that body of yours,
Ere I drank it, and you down with it, thus !

ABT VOGLER

(AFTER HE HAS BEEN EXTEMPORIZING UPON THE
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF HIS INVENTION)

I

WOULD that the structure brave, the manifold
music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their
work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as
when Solomon willed
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons
that lurk,
Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-
deep removed,—
Should rush into sight at once as he named the
ineffable Name,
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the
princess he loved !

II

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful build-
ing of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and
importuned to raise !
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart
now and now combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their
master his praise !

ABT VOGLER

And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge
down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of
things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me
my palace well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether
springs.

III

And another would mount and march, like the
excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but
with many a crest,
Raising may rampired walls of gold as transparent
as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the
rest :
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with
fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal
night—
Outlining round and round Rome's dome from
space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride
of my soul was in sight.

IV

In sight ? Not half ! for it seemed, it was certain,
to match man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse
as I ;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made
effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion,
to scale the sky :

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and
dwelt with mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its
wandering star ;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze : and they did not
pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no
more near nor far.

V

Nay more ; for there wanted not who walked in
the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place ; or, fresh from the
Protoplast,
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind
should blow,
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their
liking at last ;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed
through the body and gone,
But were back once more to breathe in an old
world worth their new :
What never had been, was now ; what was, as it
shall be anon ;
And what is,—shall I say, matched both ? for
I was made perfect too.

VI

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a
wish of my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish
flowed visibly forth,
All through music and me ! For think, had I
painted the whole,
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process
so wonder-worth :

ABT VOGLER

Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect
proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how
the tale is told ;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to
laws,
Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list
enrolled :—

VII

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will
that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and,
lo, they are !
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be
allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth
sound, but a star.
Consider it well : each tone of our scale in itself
is nought ;
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and
all is said :
Give it to me to use ! I mix it with two in my
thought :
And, there ! Ye have heard and seen : con-
sider and bow the head !

VIII

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I
reared ;
Gone ! and the good tears start, the praises
that come too slow ;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say
that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing
was to go.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Never to be again ! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance : is this your
comfort to me ?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with
my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God :
ay, what was, shall be.

IX

Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name ?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made
with hands !
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever
the same ?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that
thy power expands ?
There shall never be one lost good ! What was,
shall live as before ;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying
sound ;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so
much good more ;
On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven,
a perfect round.

X

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good
shall exist ;
Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor
good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for
the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

ABT VOGLER

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth
too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in
the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the
bard ;
Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it
by-and-by.

XI

And what is our failure here but a triumph's
evidence
For the fulness of the days ? Have we withered
or agonized ?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that sing-
ing might issue thence ?
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony
should be prized ?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the
weal and woe :
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the
ear ;
The rest may reason and welcome : 't is we
musicians know.

XII

Well, it is earth with me ; silence resumes her
reign :
I will be patient and proud, and soberly
acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord
again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—
yes,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien
ground,
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into
the deep ;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my
resting-place is found,
The C Major of this life : so, now I will try to
sleep.

RABBI BEN EZRA

I

GROW old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made :
Our times are in His hand
Who saith " A whole I planned, 5
" Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all nor
be afraid ! "

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed " Which rose make ours,
" Which lily leave and then as best recall ? "
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned " Nor Jove, nor Mars ;
" Mine be some figured flame which blends, tran-
scends them all ! "

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate : folly wide the mark ! 15
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed 20
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast :
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men ;
Irks care the crop-full bird ? Frets doubt the
maw-crammed beast ?

V

Rejoice we are allied 25
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive !
A spark disturbs our clod ;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must
believe. 30

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !
Be our joys three-parts pain !
Strive, and hold cheap the strain ; 35
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge
the throe !

VII

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail :
What I aspired to be, 40
And was not, comforts me :
A brute I might have been, but would not sink
i' the scale.

RABBI BEN EZRA

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play ? 45
To man, propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use :
I own the Past profuse 50
Of power each side, perfection every turn :
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole ;
Should not the heart beat once “How good to
live and learn ?”

Not once beat “Praise be Thine ! 55
“I see the whole design,
“I, who saw power, see now love perfect too :
“Perfect I call Thy plan :
“Thanks that I was a man !
“Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou
shalt do !” 60

XI

For pleasant is this flesh ;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest ;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold 65
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did
best !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XII

Let us not always say
"Spite of this flesh to-day
"I strove, made head, gained ground upon the
whole!"
As the bird wings and sings, 70
Let us cry "All good things
"Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than
flesh helps soul!"

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term : 75
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute ; a god though in the
germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone 80
Once more on my adventure brave and new :
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try 85
My gain or loss thereby ;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold :
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame :
Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know, being old. 90

RABBI BEN EZRA

XVI

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey :
A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest, 95
"Take it and try its worth : here dies another
day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main, 100
"That acquiescence vain :
"The Future I may face now I have proved the
Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day : 105
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true
play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth, 110
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedest age : wait death nor be
afraid !

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XX

Enough now, if the Right 115
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel
alone. 120

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past !
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained, 125
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us
peace at last !

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate ?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;
Ten, who in ears and eyes 130
Match me : we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that : whom shall my soul
believe ?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price ; 135
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a
trice :

RABBI BEN EZRA

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb, 140
So passed in making up the main account ;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the
man's amount :

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed 145
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;
* All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher
shaped. 150

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor ! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round, 155
“ Since life fleets, all is change ; the Past gone,
seize to-day ! ”

XXVII

Fool ! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall ;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :
What entered into thee, 160
That was, is, and shall be :
Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay
endure.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest : 165
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves 170
Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?
What though, about thy rim,
Scully-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look not thou down but up ! 175
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow !
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st
thou with earth's wheel ? 180

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who moulded men ;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife, 185
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy
thirst :

RABBI BEN EZRA

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work :
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand ! 190
Perfect the cup as planned !
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the
same !

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

[SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene :
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu* :
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest, 5
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace :
Mu and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.
I may not write it, but I make a cross 10
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,
And leave off here : beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, " If one should wet his lips with wine,
" And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,
" Or else the lappet of a linen robe, 15
" Into the water-vessel, lay it right,
" And cool his forehead just above the eyes,
" The while a brother, kneeling either side,
" Should chafe each hand and try to make it
warm,—
" He is not so far gone but he might speak." 20

This did not happen in the outer cave,
Nor in the secret chamber of the rock
Where, sixty days since the decree was out,
We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,
And waited for his dying all the while ; 25
But in the midmost grotto : since noon's light

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

Reached there a little, and we would not lose
The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,
With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him, 30
And brought him from the chamber in the depths,
And laid him in the light where we might see :
For certain smiles began about his mouth,
And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave, 35
The Bactrian convert, having his desire,
Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat
That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,
Plantain and quitch, the rock's shade keeps alive :
So that if any thief or soldier passed, 40
(Because the persecution was aware)
Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,
Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,
Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.
Outside was all noon and the burning blue. 45

"Here is wine," answered Xanthus,—dropped a
drop ;

I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left :
But Valens had bethought him, and produced
And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume. 50
Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn
And smile a little, as a sleeper does
If any dear one call him, touch his face—
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept : 55
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,
Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead 60
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,
And spoke, as 't were his mouth proclaiming first,
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once, 65
And sat up of himself, and looked at us ;
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word :
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
As signal we were safe, from time to time. 70

First he said, " If a friend declared to me,
" This my son Valens, this my other son,
" Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well
" This lad was very John,—I could believe !
" —Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe : 75
" So is myself withdrawn into my depths,
" The soul retreated from the perished brain
" Whence it was wont to feel and use the world
" Through these dull members, done with long ago.
" Yet I myself remain ; I feel myself : 80
" And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile ! "

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,
How divers persons witness in each man,
Three souls which make up one soul : first, to wit,
A soul of each and all the bodily parts, 85
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
And has the use of earth, and ends the man
Downward : but, tending upward for advice,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the next soul, which, seated in the brain, 90

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

Useth the first with its collected use,
And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows :
Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the last soul, that uses both the first, 95
Subsisting whether they assist or no,
And, constituting man's self, is what Is—
And leans upon the former, makes it play,
As that played off the first : and, tending up,
Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man 100
Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.
What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one
man.

I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end : 105
"Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark !
"Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself
"A little where the fire was : thus I urge
"The soul that served me, till it task once more
"What ashes of my brain have kept their shape, 110
"And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,
"Trying to taste again the truth of things—"
(He smiled)—"their very superficial truth ;
"As that ye are my sons, that it is long
"Since James and Peter had release by death, 115
"And I am only he, your brother John,
"Who saw and heard, and could remember all.
"Remember all ! It is not much to say.
"What if the truth broke on me from above
"As once and oft-times ? Such might hap again : 120
"Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,
"With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like
brass,
"The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

“ I who now shudder only and surmise
“ ‘ How did your brother bear that sight and live ? ’ 125

“ If I live yet, it is for good, more love
“ Through me to men : be nought but ashes here
“ That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—
“ Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth
“ No one alive who knew (consider this !) 130
“ —Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
“ That which was from the first, the Word of Life.
“ How will it be when none more saith ‘ I saw ’ ?

“ Such ever was love’s way : to rise, it stoops.
“ Since I, whom Christ’s mouth taught, was bidden
teach, 135
“ I went, for many years, about the world,
“ Saying ‘ It was so ; so I heard and saw,’
“ Speaking as the case asked : and men believed.
“ Afterward came the message to myself
“ In Patmos isle ; I was not bidden teach, 140
“ But simply listen, take a book and write,
“ Nor set down other than the given word,
“ With nothing left to my arbitrament
“ To choose or change : I wrote, and men believed.
“ Then, for my time grew brief, no message more, 145
“ No call to write again, I found a way,
“ And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely
taught
“ Men should, for love’s sake, in love’s strength
believe ;
“ Or I would pen a letter to a friend
“ And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more : 150
“ Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.
“ But at the last, why, I seemed left alive
“ Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,
“ To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

- "When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things ; 155
"Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'
"And go all over the old ground again,
"With Antichrist already in the world,
"And many Antichrists, who answered prompt
" 'Am I not Jasper as thyself art John ?' 160
" 'Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest
forget :
" 'Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe ?'
"I never thought to call down fire on such,
"Or, as in wonderful and early days,
"Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb ; 165
"But patient stated much of the Lord's life
"Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work :
"Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
"Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
"Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match, 170
"Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
"Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
"Of new significance and fresh result ;
"What first were guessed as points, I now knew
stars,
"And named them in the Gospel I have writ. 175
"For men said, 'It is getting long ago :
" 'Where is the promise of His coming ?'—asked
"These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,
"Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.
"I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully, 180
"Since I was there, and helpful in my age ;
"And, in the main, I think such men believed.
"Finally, thus endeavouring, I fell sick,
"Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,
"And went to sleep with one thought that, at least, 185
"Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,
"We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.
"Yet now I wake in such decrepitude

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"As I had slidden down and fallen afar,
 "Past even the presence of my former self, 190
 "Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,
 "Till I am found away from my own world,
 "Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,
 "Along with unborn people in strange lands,
 "Who say—I hear said or conceive they say— 195
 "'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
 "'Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

"And how shall I assure them? Can they share
 "—They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and
 strength
 "About each spirit, that needs must bide its time, 200
 "Living and learning still as years assist'
 "Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—
 "With me who hardly am withheld at all,
 "But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,
 "Lie bare to the universal prick of light? 205
 "Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,
 "We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain
 ends too.
 "To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death
 "Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is;
 "—Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else. 210
 "Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
 "Is not His love at issue still with sin
 "Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
 "Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?
 "Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise 215
 "To the right hand of the throne—what is it
 beside,
 "When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods
 my soul,
 "And, as I saw the sin and death, even so
 "See I the need yet transiency of both,

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

- "The good and glory consummated thence? 220
"I saw the power; I see the Love, once weak,
"Resume the Power: and in this word 'I see,'
"Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both
"That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds
"His eye and bids him look. These are, I see; 225
"But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,
"Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass
"I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,
"It had been given a crafty smith to make;
"A tube, he turned on objects brought too close, 230
"Lying confusedly insubordinate
"For the unassisted eye to master once:
"Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,
"Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear!
"Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth 235
"I see, reduced to plain historic fact,
"Diminished into clearness, proved a point
"And far away: ye would withdraw your sense
"From out eternity, strain it upon time,
"Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death, 240
"Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
"As though a star should open out, all sides,
"Grow the world on you, as it is my world.
- "For life, with all it yields, of joy and woe,
"And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,— 245
"Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
"How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
"And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
"Such prize despite the envy of the world,
"And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all. 250
"But see the double way wherein we are led,
"How the soul learns diversely from the flesh!
"With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,
"And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- " Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light, 255
 " And warmth was cherishing and food was choice
 " To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
 " As now to yours and mine ; the body sprang
 " At once to the height, and stayed : but the soul,
 —no !
 " Since sages who, this noontide, meditate 260
 " In Rome or Athens, may descry some point
 " Of the eternal power, hid yestereve ;
 " And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,
 " So much extends the æther floating o'er,
 " The love that tops the might, the Christ in God. 265
 " Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these
 " Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,
 " So duly, daily, needs provision be
 " For keeping the soul's prowess possible,
 " Building new barriers as the old decay, 270
 " Saving us from evasion of life's proof,
 " Putting the question ever, ' Does God love,
 " ' And will ye hold that truth against the world ? '
 " Ye know there needs no second proof with good
 " Gained for our flesh from any earthly source : 275
 " We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,
 " Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,
 " And guard it safe through every chance, ye
 know !
 " That fable of Prometheus and his theft,
 " How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows
 old 280
 " (I have been used to hear the pagans own)
 " And out of mind ; but fire, howe'er its birth,
 " Here is it, precious to the sophist now
 " Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,
 " As precious to those satyrs of his play, 285
 " Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.
 " While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

- “Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe,
and sure
- “To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—
- “Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth 290
- “Crumble ; for he both reasons and decides,
- “Weighs first, then chooses : will he give up fire
- “For gold or purple once he knows its worth ?
- “Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain ?
- “Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift, 295
- “Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,
- “And straightway in his life acknowledge it,
- “As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.
- “Sigh ye, ‘It had been easier once than now’ ?
- “To give you answer I am left alive ; 300
- “Look at me who was present from the first !
- “Ye know what things I saw ; then came a test,
- “My first, befitting me who so had seen :
- “‘Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured,
Him
- “‘Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life ? 305
- “‘What should wring this from thee !’—ye laugh
and ask.
- “What wrung it ? Even a torchlight and a noise,
- “The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,
- “And fear of what the Jews might do ! Just that,
- “And it is written, ‘I forsook and fled’ : 310
- “There was my trial, and it ended thus.
- “Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow :
- “Another year or two,—what little child,
- “What tender woman that had seen no least
- “Of all my sights, but barely heard them told, 315
- “Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,
- “Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God ?
- “Well, was truth safe for ever, then ? Not so.
- “Already had begun the silent work
- “Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze, 320

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- " Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched
 doubt.
 " Teachers were busy, whispering ' All is true
 " ' As the aged ones report ; but youth can reach
 " ' Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and
 strain,
 " ' And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.' 325
 " Thus, what the Roman's slowerd spear was found,
 " A bar to me who touched and handled truth,
 " Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd
 tongue,
 " This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,
 " Till imminent was the outcry ' Save our Christ !' 330
 " Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life
 " Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.
 " Such work done, as it will be, what comes next?
 " What do I hear say, or conceive men say,
 " ' Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?' 335
 " ' Assure us, ere we ask what he might see !'

 " Is this indeed a burthen for late days,
 " And may I help to bear it with you all,
 " Using my weakness which becomes your strength?
 " For if a babe were born inside this grot, 340
 " Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,
 " Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—
 " One loving him and wishful he should learn,
 " Would much rejoice himself was blinded first .
 " Month by month here, so made to understand 345
 " How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss :
 " I think I could explain to such a child
 " There was more glow outside than gleams he
 caught,
 " Ay, nor need urge ' I saw it, so believe !'
 " It is a heavy burthen you shall bear 350
 " In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

"Left without me, which must be very soon.
"What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it!
"I see you stand conversing, each new face,
"Either in fields, of yellow summer eves, 355
"On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;
"Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico
"Out of the crowd in some enormous town
"Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;
"Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand 360
"Idly conjectured to be Ephesus :
"And no one asks his fellow any more
" 'Where is the promise of His coming?' but
" 'Was he revealed in any of His lives,
" 'As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?' 365

"Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,
"And let us ask and answer and be saved !
"My book speaks on, because it cannot pass ;
"One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads
" 'Here is a tale of things done ages since ; 370
" 'What truth was ever told the second day ?
" 'Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for
nought.
" 'Remains the doctrine, love ; well, we must love,
" 'And what we love most, power and love in one,
" 'Let us acknowledge on the record here, 375
" 'Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be ?
" 'Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?
" 'Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.
" 'First of the love, then ; we acknowledge Christ—
" 'A proof we comprehend His love, a proof 380
" 'We had such love already in ourselves,
" 'Knew first what else we should not recognize.
" ' 'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,
" 'And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,
" 'Becomes accounted somewhat out of him ; 385

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

“ ‘ He throws it up in air, it drops down earth’s,
 “ ‘ With shape, name, story added, man’s old way.
 “ ‘ How prove you Christ came otherwise at least?
 “ ‘ Nexttrythepower: Hemadeandrulstheworld:
 “ ‘ Certes there is a world once made, now ruled, 390
 “ ‘ Unless things have been ever as we see.
 “ ‘ Our sires declared a charioteer’s yoked steeds
 “ ‘ Brought the sun up the east and down the west,
 “ ‘ Which only of itself now rises, sets,
 “ ‘ As if a hand impelled it and a will,— 395
 “ ‘ Thus they long thought, they who had will and
 hands :
 “ ‘ But the new question’s whisper is distinct,
 “ ‘ Wherefore mustallforce needs be like purselves?
 “ ‘ We have the hands, the will ; what made and
 drives
 “ ‘ The sun is force, is law, is named, not known, 400
 “ ‘ Whilewill and lovewe do know; marks of these,
 “ ‘ Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—
 “ ‘ As that, to punish or reward our race,
 “ ‘ The sun at undue times arose or set
 “ ‘ Or else stood still : what do not men affirm ? 405
 “ ‘ But earth requires as urgently reward
 “ ‘ Or punishment to-day as years ago,
 “ ‘ And none expects the sun will interpose :
 “ ‘ Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,
 “ ‘ Or erringzeal for right, which changed the truth. 410
 “ ‘ Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things ;
 “ ‘ Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,
 “ ‘ Man’s!—which hegives, supposing he but finds,
 “ ‘ As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,
 “ ‘ To help these in what forms he called his gods. 415
 “ ‘ First, Jove’s brow, Juno’s eyes were swept away,
 “ ‘ But Jove’s wrath, Juno’s pride continued long;
 “ ‘ As last, will, power, and love discarded these,
 “ ‘ So law in turn discards power, love, and will.

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

- “ ‘What proveth God is otherwise at least? 420
“ ‘All else, projection from the mind of man!’
“ Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,
“ But place my gospel where I put my hands.
“ I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
“ That help, he needed once, and needs no more, 425
“ Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
“ For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
“ This imports solely, man should mount on each
“ Newheight in view; the help whereby he mounts,
“ The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall, 430
“ Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.
“ Man apprehends Him newly at each stage
“ Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;
“ And nothing shall prove twice what once was
proved.
“ You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs 435
“ To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,
“ And check the careless step would spoil their birth;
“ But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,
“ Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,
“ It is no longer for old twigs ye look, 440
“ Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,
“ But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,
“ For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is
plain,
“ Nor miracles need prove it any more.
“ Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade 'ware 445
“ At first of root and stem, saved both till now
“ From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.
“ What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,
“ And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?
“ No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er
forgets: 450
“ May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

“ This might be pagan teaching : now hear mine.

“ I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,

“ Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,

“ So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth : 455

“ When they can eat, babe's-nurture is withdrawn.

“ I fed the babe whether it would or no :

“ I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.

“ I cried once, ‘ That ye may believe in Christ,

“ ‘ Behold this blind man shall receive his sight ! ’ 460

“ I cry now, ‘ Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*

“ ‘ *And smile at stories how John's word could cure—*

“ ‘ *Repeat that miracle and take my faith ?* ’

“ I say, that miracle was duly wrought

“ When, save for it, no faith was possible. 465

“ Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o'
the world,

“ Whether the change came from our minds which
see

“ Of shows o' the world so much as and no more

“ Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I

“ See now, suppose you, there where you see rock 470

“ Round us ?)—I know not ; such was the effect,

“ So faith grew, making void more miracles

“ Because too much : they would compel, not help.

“ I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ

“ Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee 475

“ All questions in the earth and out of it,

“ And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

“ Wouldst thou unprove this store-prove the proved ?

“ In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,

“ Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung ? 480

“ Thou hast it ; use it and forthwith, or die !

“ For I say, this is death and the sole death,

“ When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,

“ Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

“And lack of love from love made manifest ; 485

“A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes ;

“A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.

“With ignorance was surety of a cure.

“When man, appalled at nature, questioned first

“‘What if there lurk a might behind this might?’ 490

“He needed satisfaction God could give,

“And did give, as ye have the written word :

“But when he finds might still redouble might,

“Yet asks, ‘Since all is might, what use of will?’

“—Will, the one source of might,—he being man 495

“With a man's will and a man's might, to teach

“In little how the two combine in large,—

“That man has turned round on himself and stands,

“Which in the course of nature is, to die.

“And when man questioned, ‘What if there be love 500

“‘Behind the will and might, as real as they?’—

“He needed satisfaction God could give,

“And did give, as ye have the written word :

“But when, beholding that love everywhere,

“He reasons, ‘Since such love is everywhere, 505

“‘And since ourselves can love and would be loved,

“‘We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,’—

“How shall ye help this man who knows himself,

“That he must love and would be loved again,

“Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ, 510

“Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?

“The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags

“Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

“If he rejoins, ‘But this was all the while

“‘A trick ; the fault was, first of all, in thee, 515

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- “ ‘Thy story of the places, names and dates,
 “ ‘Where, when and how the ultimate truth had
 rise,
 “ ‘—Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,
 “ ‘Whence now the second suffers detriment.
 “ ‘What good of giving knowledge if, because 520
 “ ‘O’ the manner of the gift, its profit fail?
 “ ‘And why refuse what modicum of help
 “ ‘Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible
 “ ‘I’ the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?
 “ ‘Why must I hit of this and miss of that, 525
 “ ‘Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,
 “ ‘And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,
 “ ‘Was this once, was it not once?—then and now
 “ ‘And evermore, plain truth from man to man.
 “ ‘Is John’s procedure just the heathen bard’s? 530
 “ ‘Put question of his famous play again
 “ ‘How for the ephemerals’ sake Jove’s fire was
 filched,
 “ ‘And carried in a cane and brought to earth:
 “ ‘*The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,*
 “ ‘*Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,* 535
 “ ‘*Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*
 “ ‘As with the Titan’s, so now with thy tale:
 “ ‘Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,
 “ ‘Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?’

 “ ‘I answer, Have ye yet to argue out 540
 “ ‘The very primal thesis, plainest law,
 “ ‘—Man is not God but hath God’s end to serve,
 “ ‘A master to obey, a course to take,
 “ ‘Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?
 “ ‘Grant this, then man must pass from old to new, 545
 “ ‘From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
 “ ‘From what once seemed good, to what now
 proves best.

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

- "How could man have progression otherwise?
"Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'
"No savage man inquired 'What am myself?' 550
"Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'
"Man takes that title now if he believes
"Might can exist with neither will nor love,
"In God's case—what he names now Nature's
Law—
"While in himself he recognizes love 555
"No less than might and will : and rightly takes.
"Since if man prove the sole existent thing
"Where these combine, whatever their degree,
"However weak the might or will or love,
"So they be found there, put in evidence,— 560
"He is as surely higher in the scale
"Than any might with neither love nor will,
"As life, apparent in the poorest midge,
"(When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its
wing)
"Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self— 565
"Given to the nobler midge for resting-place !
"Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in
fine,
"And thus the victory leads but to defeat,
"The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,
"His life becomes impossible, which is death. 570

"But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch
"He is mere man, and in humility
"Neither may know God nor mistake himself ;
"I point to the immediate consequence
"And say, by such confession straight he falls 575
"Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,
"Made to know that he can know and not more :
"Lower than God who knows all and can all,
"Higher than beasts which know and can so far

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"As each beast's limit, perfect to an end, 580
 "Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;
 "While man knows partly but conceives beside,
 "Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
 "And in this striving, this converting air
 "Into a solid he may grasp and use, 585
 "Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
 "Not God's, and not the beasts' : God is, they are,
 "Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.
 "Such progress could no more attend his soul
 "Were all it struggles after found at first 590
 "And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,
 "Than motion wait his body, were all else
 "Than it the solid earth on every side,
 "Where now through space he moves 'from rest
 to rest.
 "Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect 595
 "He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
 "What he considers that he knows to-day,
 "Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown ;
 "Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
 "Because he lives, which is to be a man, 600
 "Set to instruct himself by his past self :
 "First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
 "Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,
 "Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
 "God's gift was that man should conceive of truth 605
 "And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,
 "As midway help till he reach fact indeed.
 "The statuary ere he mould a shape
 "Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next
 "The aspiration to produce the same ; 610
 "So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,
 "Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see' :
 "Yet all the while goes changing what was
 wrought,

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

"From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.
"How were it had he cried 'I see no face, 615
" 'No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay' ?
"Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,
"And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again !'
"Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,
"Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed 620
"In what is still flesh-imitating clay.
"Right in you, right in him, such way be man's !
"God only makes the live shape at a jet.
"Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship ?
"The pattern on the Mount subsists no more, 625
"Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness ;
"But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,
"Serve still and are replaced as time requires :
"By these, make newest vessels, reach the type !
"If ye demur, this judgment on your head, 630
"Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,
"Indulging every instinct of the soul
"There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

"Such is the burthen of the latest time.
"I have survived to hear it with my ears, 635
"Answer it with my lips : does this suffice ?
"For if there be a further woe than such,
"Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,
"So long as any pulse is left in mine,
"May I be absent even longer-yet, 640
"Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,
"Though I should tarry a new hundred years !"

But he was dead ; 't was about noon, the day
Somewhat declining : we five buried him
That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways, 645
And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.
Valens is lost, I know not of his trace ;
The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
And could not write nor speak, but only loved : 650
So, lest the memory of this go quite,
Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,
I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe !
For many look again to find that face,
Beloved John's to whom I ministered, 655
Somewhere in life about the world ; they err :
Either mistaking what was darkly spoke
At ending of his book, as he relates,
Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech
Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose. 660
Believe ye will not see him any more
About the world with his divine regard !
For all was as I say, and now the man
Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

[Cerinthus read and mused ; one added this : 665

“ If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
“ Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—
“ Account Him, for reward of what He was,
“ Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.
“ For see ; Himself conceived of life as love, 670
“ Conceived of love as what must enter in,
“ Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved :
“ Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.
“ Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.
“ But by this time are many souls set free, 675
“ And very many still retained alive :
“ Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,
“ Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)
“ See if, for every finger of thy hands,

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

“ There be not found, that day the world shall end, 680
“ Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word
“ That He will grow incorporate with all,
“ With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,
“ Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?
“ Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do. 685
“ Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
“ Or lost !”

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS; OR, NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself"

[WILL sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things' course, 5
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh :
And while above his head a pompion-plant,
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside, 10
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
And recross till they weave a spider-web
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please, 15
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,
Could He but know ! and time to vex is now,
When talk is safer than in winter-time.
Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep 20
In confidence he drudges at their task,
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos !
'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon. 25

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
But not the stars ; the stars came otherwise ;
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that :
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same. 30

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease :
He hated that He cannot change His cold,
Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she
lived,
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine 35
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave ;
Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
At the other kind of water, not her life,
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun) 40
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to
breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike : so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing. 45
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech ;
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge
eye
By moonlight ; and the pie with the long tongue 50
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants ; the ants themselves
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
About their hole—He made all these and more, 55
Made all we see, and us, in spite : how else ?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

He could not, Himself, make a second self
To be His mate ; as well have made Himself :
He would not make what he mislikes or slights,
An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains : 60
But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—
Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it. 65
Because, so brave, so better though they be,
It nothing skills if He begin to plague.
Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,
Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,
Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,— 70
Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,
Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my
brain ;
Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,
And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.
Put case, unable to be what I wish, 75
I yet could make a live bird out of clay :
Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
Able to fly?—for, there, see, he hath wings,
And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
And there, a sting to do his foes offence, 80
There, and I will that he begin to live,
Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns
Of grigs high up that make the merry din,
Saucy through their veined wings, and mind menot.
In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay, 85
And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh ;
And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,
Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,
Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—
Well, as the chance were, this might take or else 90
Not take my fancy : I might hear his cry,

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

And give the mankin three sound legs for one,
Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,
And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.
Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme, 95
Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,
Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,
Nor kind, nor cruel : He is strong and Lord.
'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs 100
That march now from the mountain to the sea ;
'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off ; 105
'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
And two worms he whose nippers end in red ;
As it likes me each time, I do : so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,
Placable if His mind and ways were guessed, 110
But rougher than his handiwork, be sure !
Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
That they, unless through Him, do nought at all, 115
And must submit : what other use in things ?
'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint
That, blown through, gives exact the scream o'
the jay

When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue :
Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay 120
Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt :
Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth
"I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
"I make the cry my maker cannot make

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

“With his great round mouth ; he must blow
through mine !” 125
Would not I smash it with my foot ? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease ?
Aha, that is a question ! Ask, for that,
What knows,—the something over Setebos
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought, 130
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
There may be something quiet o’er His head,
Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,
Since both derive from weakness in some way.
I joy because the quails come ; would not joy 135
Could I bring quails here when I have a mind :
This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth. ‘
’Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,
But never spends much thought nor care that way.
It may look up, work up,—the worse for those 140
It works on ! ‘Careth but for Setebos
The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,
Who, making Himself feared through what He
does,
Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar
To what is quiet and hath happy life ; 145
Next looks down here, and out of very spite
Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,
These good things to match those as hips do
grapes.
’T is solace making baubles, ay, and sport.
Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books 150
Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle :
Vexed, ’stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-
shaped,
Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words ;
Has peeled a wand and called it by a name ;
Weareth at whiles for an enchanter’s robe 155

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

The eyed skin of a supple oncelot ;
And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,
A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,
Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,
And saith she is Miranda and my wife : 160
'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane
He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge ;
Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge 165
In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban ;
A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.
'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
Taketh his mirth with make-believes : so He.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things 170
Which Setebos vexed only : 'holds not so.
Who made them weak, meant weakness He might
vex.

Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow, 175
Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
Like an orc's armour ? Ay,—so spoil His sport !
He is the One now : only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.
Ay, himself loves what does him good ; but why ? 180
'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast
Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,
But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate
Or love, just as it liked him : He hath eyes.
Also it pleaseth Setebos to work, 185
Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,
By no means for the love of what is worked.
'Tasteth. himself, no finer good i' the world

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,
And he wants little, hungers, aches not much, 190
Than trying what to do with wit and strength.
'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,
And squared and stuck there squares of soft white
chalk,

And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,
And set up endwise certain spikes of tree, 195
And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,
Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.
No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake ;
'Shall some day knock it down again : so He.

'Saith He is terrible : watch His feats in proof ! 200
One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.
He hath a spite against me, that I know,
Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why ?
So it is, all the same, as well I find.

'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm 205
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
Crawling to lay their eggs here : well, one wave,
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
And licked the whole labour flat : so much for
spite. 210

'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)
Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade :
Often they scatter sparkles : there is force !
'Dug up a newt He may have envied once
And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone. 215
Please Him and hinder this?—What Prosper does?
Aha, if He would tell me how ! Not He !
There is the sport : discover how or die !
All need not die, for of the things o' the isle
Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees ; 220
Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

When . . . when . . . well, never try the same
way twice !

Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself : 225

'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears
But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,
And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence :
'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,
Curls up into a ball, pretending death 230

For fright at my approach : the two ways please.
But what would move my choler more than this,
That either creature counted on its life
To-morrow and next day and all days to come,
Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart, 235

"Because he did so yesterday with me,
"And otherwise with such another brute,
"So must he do henceforth and always."—Ay ?
Would teach the reasoning couple what "must"
means !

'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord ? So He. 240

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
And we shall have to live in fear of Him
So long as He lives, keeps His strength : no
change,

If He have done His best, make no new world
To please Him more, so leave off watching this,— 245
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it
As grubs grow butterflies : else, here are we,
And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop. 250
His dam held different, that after death
He both plagued enemies and feasted friends :

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Idly ! He doth His worst in this our life,
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end. 255
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
 Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,
 Bask on the pompion-bell above : kills both.
 'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball 260
 On head and tail as if to save their lives :
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose
 This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,
 And always, above all else, envies Him ; 265
 Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now :
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,
 O'erheard this speech, and asked "What chucklest
 at ?" 270

'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,
 Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,
 Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste :
 While myself lit a fire, and made a song 275
 And sung it, "*What I hate, be consecrate*
 "*To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate*
 "*For Thee ; what see for envy in poor me ?*"
 Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,
 Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime, 280
 That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
 And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
 Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

[What, what ? A curtain o'er the world at once !
 Crickets stop hissing ; not a bird—or, yes, 285

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

There scuds His raven that has told Him all !
It was fool's play, this prattling ! Ha ! The wind
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the
move,

And fast invading fires begin ! White blaze—
A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there,
there, there,

290

His thunder follows ! Fool to gibe at Him !

Lo ! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos !

'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,

Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month

One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape !]

295

CONFESSIONS

I

WHAT is he buzzing in my ears ?

“ Now that I come to die,

“ Do I view the world as a vale of tears ? ”

Ah, reverend sir, not I !

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again

Where the physic bottles stand

On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,

With a wall to my bedside hand.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,

From a house you could descry

O'er the garden-wall : is the curtain blue

Or green to a healthy eye ?

IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather

Blue above lane and wall ;

And that farthest bottle labelled “ Ether ”

Is the house o'ertopping all.

V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,

There watched for me, one June,

A girl : I know, sir, it 's improper,

My poor mind 's out of tune.

CONFESSIONS

VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except :
They styled their house "The Lodge."

VII

What right had a lounge up their lane ?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,

VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"
And stole from stair to stair,

IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir—used to meet :
How sad and bad and mad it was—
But then, how it was sweet !

MAY AND DEATH

I

I wish that when you died last May,
Charles, there had died along with you
Three parts of spring's delightful things ;
Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

II

A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps !
There must be many a pair of friends
Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm
Moon-births and the long evening-ends.

III

So, for their sake, be May still May !
Let their new time, as mine of old,
Do all it did for me : I bid
Sweet sights and sounds throng manifold.

IV

Only, one little sight, one plant,
Woods have in May, that starts up green
Save a sole streak which, so to speak,
Is spring's blood, spilt its leaves between,-

That, they might spare ; a certain wood
Might miss the plant ; their loss were small
But I,—whene'er the leaf grows there,
Its drop comes from my heart, that 's all.

DEAF AND DUMB

A GROUP BY WOOLNER

ONLY the prism's obstruction shows aright
The secret of a sunbeam, breaks its light
Into the jewelled bow from blankest white ;
 So may a glory from defect arise :
Only by Deafness may the vexed Love wreak
Its insuppressive sense on brow and cheek,
Only by Dumbness adequately speak
 Asfavoured mouth could never, through the eyes.

PROSPICE

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go :
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle 's to fight ere the guerdon be
gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last !
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and
forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest !

EURYDICE TO ORPHEUS

A PICTURE BY LEIGHTON

BUT give them me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow!
Let them once more absorb me ! One look now
Will lap me round for ever, not to pass
Out of its light, though darkness lie beyond :
Hold me but safe again within the bond
Of one immortal look ! All woe that was,
Forgotten, and all terror that may be,
Defied,—no past is mine, no future : look at me !

YOUTH AND ART

I

It once might have been, once only :
We lodged in a street together,
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

II

Your trade was with sticks and clay,
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
Then laughed "They will see some day
"Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

III

My business was song, song, song ;
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
"Kate Brown 's on the boards ere long,
"And Grisi's existence embittered !"

IV

I earned no more by a warble
Than you by a sketch in plaster ;
You wanted a piece of marble,
I needed a music-master.

V

We studied hard in our styles,
Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,
For air looked out on the tiles,
For fun watched each other's windows.

YOUTH AND ART

VI

You lounged, like a boy of the South,
Cap and blouse—nay, a bit of beard too ;
Or you got it, rubbing your mouth
With fingers the clay adhered to.

VII

And I—soon managed to find
Weak points in the flower-fence facing,
Was forced to put up a blind
And be safe in my corset-lacing.

VIII

No harm ! It was not my fault
If you never turned your eye's tail up
As I shook upon E *in alt*,
Or ran the chromatic scale up :

IX

For spring bade the sparrows pair,
And the boys and girls gave guesses,
And stalls in our street looked rare
With bulrush and watercresses.

X

Why did not you pinch a flower
In a pellet of clay and fling it ?
Why did not I put a power
Of thanks in a look, or sing it ?

XI

I did look, sharp as a lynx,
(And yet the memory rankles)
When models arrived, some minx
Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankle.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

XII

But I think I gave you as good !
“ That foreign fellow,—who can know
“ How she pays, in a playful mood,
“ For his tuning her that piano ? ”

XIII

Could you say so, and never say
“ Suppose we join hands and fortunes,
“ And I fetch her from over the way,
“ Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes ? ”

XIV

No, no : you would not be rash,
Nor I rasher and something over :
You 've to settle yet Gibson's hash,
And Grisi yet lives in clover.

XV

But you meet the Prince at the Board,
I 'm queen myself at *bals-paré*,
I 've married a rich old lord,
And you 're dubbed knight and an R.A.

XVI

Each life unfulfilled, you see ;
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy :
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

XVII

And nobody calls you a dunce,
And people suppose me clever :
This could but have happened once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

A FACE

IF one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers !
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile ; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all : but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver on the pale gold ground
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts !
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb :
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momentarily
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
(That 's the pale ground you 'd see this sweet
face by),
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

A LIKENESS

SOME people hang portraits up
In a room where they dine or sup :
And the wife clinks tea-things under,
And her cousin, he stirs his cup,
Asks, "Who was the lady, I wonder?"
" 'T is a daub John bought at a sale,"
Quoth the wife,—looks black as thunder :
"What a shade beneath her nose !
"Snuff-taking, I suppose,—"
Adds the cousin, while John's corns ail.

Or else, there 's no wife in the case,
But the portrait 's queen of the place,
Alone mid the other spoils
Of youth,—masks, gloves and foils,
And pipe-sticks, rose, cherry-tree, jasmine,
And the long whip, the tandem-lasher,
And the cast from a fist ("not, alas ! mine,
"But my master's, the Tipton Slasher"),
And the cards where pistol-balls mark ace,
And a satin shoe used for cigar-case,
And the chamois-horns ("shot in the Chablais")
And prints—Rarey drumming on Cruiser,
And Sayers, our champion, the bruiser,
And the little edition of Rabelais :
Where a friend, with both hands in his pockets,
May saunter up close to examine it,
And remark a good deal of Jane Lamb in it,
"But the eyes are half out of their sockets ;

A LIKENESS

"That hair 's not so bad, where the gloss is,
"But they 've made the girl's nose a proboscis :
"Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy !
"What, is not she Jane ? Then, who is she ?"

All that I own is a print,
An etching, a mezzotint ;
'T is a study, a fancy, a fiction,
Yet a fact (take my conviction)
Because it has more than a hint
Of a certain face, I never
Saw elsewhere touch or trace of
In women I 've seen the face of :
Just an etching, and, so far, clever.

I keep my prints, an imbroglio,
Fifty in one portfolio.
When somebody tries my claret,
We turn round chairs to the fire,
Chirp over days in a garret,
Chuckle o'er increase of salary,
Taste the good fruits of our leisure,
Talk about pencil and lyre,
And the National Portrait Gallery :
Then I exhibit my treasure.
After we 've turned over twenty,
And the debt of wonder my crony owes
Is paid to my Marc Antonios,
He stops me—" *Festina lentè !*"
"What 's that sweet thing there, the etching ?"
How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,
How my cheeks grow red as tomatos,
How my heart leaps ! But hearts, after leaps, ache.

"By the by, you must take, for a keepsake,
"That other, you praised, of Volpato's."

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

The fool ! would he try a flight further and say—
He never saw, never before to-day,
What was able to take his breath away,
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age
With the dream of, meet death with,—why, I 'll
 not engage
But that, half in a rapture and half in a rage,
I should toss him the thing's self—" 'T is only
 a duplicate,
" A thing of no value ! Take it, I supplicate ! "

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Now, don't, sir! Don't expose me! Just this
once!

This was the first and only time, I 'll swear,—
Look at me,—see, I kneel,—the only time,
I swear, I ever cheated,—yes, by the soul
Of Her who hears—(your sainted mother, sir!) 5
All, except this last accident, was truth—
This little kind of slip!—and even this,
It was your own wine, sir, the good champagne,
(I took it for Catawba, you 're so kind)
Which put the folly in my head!

"Get up?" 10

You still inflict on me that terrible face?
You show no mercy?—Not for Her dear sake,
The sainted spirit's, whose soft breath even now
Blows on my cheek—(don't you feel something,
sir?)
You 'll tell?

Go tell, then! Who the devil cares 15
What such a rowdy chooses to . . .

Aie—aie—aie!

Please, sir! your thumbs are through my wind-
pipe, sir!
Ch—ch!

Well, sir, I hope you 've done it now!
Oh Lord! I little thought, sir, yesterday,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

When your departed mother spoke those words 20
Of peace through me, and moved you, sir, so
much,
You gave me—(very kind it was of you)
These shirt-studs—(better take them back again,
Please, sir)—yes, little did I think so soon
A trifle of trick, all through a glass too much 25
Of his own champagne, would change my best of
friends
Into an angry gentleman !

Though, 't was wrong.
I don't contest the point ; your anger 's just :
Whatever put such folly in my head,
I know 't was wicked of me. There 's'a thick 30
Dusk undeveloped spirit (I 've observed)
Owes me a grudge—a negro's, I should say,
Or else an Irish emigrant's ; yourself
Explained the case so well last Sunday, sir,
When we had summoned Franklin to clear up 35
A point about those shares i' the telegraph :
Ay, and he swore . . . or might it be Tom
Paine ? . . .

Thumping the table close by where I crouched,
He 'd do me soon a mischief : that 's come true !
Why, now your face clears ! I was sure it would ! 40
Then, this one time . . . don't take your hand
away,

Through yours I surely kiss your mother's hand . . .
You 'll promise to forgive me ?—or, at least,
Tell nobody of this ? Consider, sir !
What harm can mercy do ? Would but the shade 45
Of the venerable dead—one just vouchsafe
A rap or tip ! What bit of paper 's here ?
Suppose we take a pencil, let her write,
Make the least sign, she urges on her child

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Forgiveness? There now! Eh? Oh! 'T was
your foot, 50
And not a natural creak, sir?

Answer, then!
Once, twice, thrice . . . see, I'm waiting to say
"thrice!"

All to no use? No sort of hope for me?
It's all to post to Greeley's newspaper?

What? If I told you all about the tricks? 55
Upon my soul!—the whole truth, and nought else,
And how there's been some falsehood—for your
part,

Will you engage to pay my passage out,
And hold*your tongue until I'm safe on board?
England's the place, not Boston—no offence! 60

I see what makes you hesitate: don't fear!
I mean to change my trade and cheat no more,
Yes, this time really it's upon my soul!
Be my salvation!—under Heaven, of course.
I'll tell some queer things. Sixty Vs must do. 65
A trifle, though, to start with! We'll refer
The question to this table?

How you're changed!
Then split the difference; thirty more, we'll say.
Ay, but you leave my presents! Else I'll swear
'T was all through those: you wanted yours again, 70
So, picked a quarrel with me, to get them back!
Tread on a worm, it turns, sir! If I turn,
Your fault! 'T is you'll have forced me! Who's
obliged

To give up life yet try no self-defence?
At all events, I'll run the risk. Eh?

Done! 75
May I sit, sir? This dear old table, now!

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Please, sir, a parting egg-nogg and cigar !
I 've been so happy with you! Nice stuffed chairs,
And sympathetic sideboards ; what an end
To all the instructive evenings ! (It 's alight.) 80
Well, nothing lasts, as Bacon came and said.
Here goes,—but keep your temper, or I 'll scream!

Fol-lol-the-rido-liddle-iddle-ol !

You see, sir, it 's your own fault more than mine ;
It 's all your fault, you curious gentlefolk ! 85
You 're prigs,—excuse me,—like to look so spry,
So clever, while you cling by half a claw
To the perch whereon you puff yourselves at roost,
Such piece of self-conceit as serves for perch
Because you chose it, so it must be safe. 90
Oh, otherwise you 're sharp enough ! You spy
Who slips, who slides, who holds by help of wing,
Wanting real foothold,—who can't keep upright
On the other perch, your neighbour chose, not you:
There 's no outwitting you respecting him ! 95
For instance, men love money—that, you know
And what men do to gain it : well, suppose
A poor lad, say a help's son in your house,
Listening at keyholes, hears the company
Talk grand of dollars, V-notes, and so forth, 100
How hard they are to get, how good to hold,
How much they buy,—if, suddenly, in pops he—
“ I 've got a V-note ! ”—what do you say to him ?
What 's your first word which follows your last kick ?
“ Where did you steal it, rascal ? ” That 's because 105
He finds you, fain would fool you, off your perch,
Not on the special piece of nonsense, sir,
Elected your parade-ground : let him try
Lies to the end of the list,—“ He picked it up,
“ His cousin died and left it him by will, 110
“ The President flung it to him, riding by,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

"An actress trucked it for a curl of his hair,
"He dreamed of luck and found his shoe enriched,
"He dug up clay, and out of clay made gold"—
How would you treat such possibilities? 115
Would not you, prompt, investigate the case
With cow-hide? "Lies, lies, lies," you 'd shout :
and why?
Which of the stories might not prove mere truth?
This last, perhaps, that clay was turned to coin!
Let 's see, now, give him me to speak for him! 120
How many of your rare philosophers,
In plaguy books I 've had to dip into,
Believed gold could be made thus, saw it made
And made it? Oh, with such philosophers
You 're on your best behaviour! While the lad— 125
With him, in a trice, you settle likelihoods,
Nor doubt a moment how he got his prize :
In his case, you hear, judge and execute,
All in a breath : so would most men of sense.

But let the same lad hear you talk as grand 130
At the same keyhole, you and company,
Of signs and wonders, the invisible world ;
How wisdom scouts our vulgar unbelief
More than our vulgarest credulity ;
How good men have desired to see a ghost, 135
What Johnson used to say, what Wesley did,
Mother Goose thought, and fiddle-diddle-dee :—
If he break in with, "Sir, / saw 'a ghost!"
Ah, the ways change! He finds you perched and
prim ;

It 's a conceit of yours that ghosts may be : 140
There 's no talk now of cow-hide. "Tell it out !
"Don't fear us! Take your time and recollect !
"Sit down first : try a glass of wine, my boy !
"And, David, (is not that your Christian name?)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"Of all things, should this happen twice—it may— 145
 "Be sure, while fresh in mind, you let us know!"
 Does the boy blunder, blurt out this, blab that,
 Break down in the other, as beginners will?
 All 's candour, all 's considerateness—"No haste!
 "Pause and collect yourself! We understand! 150
 "That 's the bad memory, or the natural shock,
 "Or the unexplained *phenomena*!"

Egad,

The boy takes heart of grace; finds, never fear,
 The readiest way to ope your own heart wide,
 Show—what I call your peacock-perch, pet post 155
 To strut, and spread the tail, and squawk upon!
 "Just as you thought, much as you might expect!
 "There be more things in heaven and earth,
 Horatio," . . .

And so on. Shall not David take the hint,
 Grow bolder, stroke you down at quickened rate? 160
 If he ruffle a feather, it 's "Gently, patiently!"
 "Manifestations are so weak at first!
 "Doubting, moreover, kills them, cuts all short,
 "Cures with a vengeance!"

There, sir, that 's your style!

You and your boy—such pains bestowed on him, 165
 Or any headpiece of the average worth,
 To teach, say, Greek, would perfect him apace,
 Make him a Person ("Porson?" thank you, sir!)
 Much more, proficient in the art of lies.
 You never leave the lesson! Fire alight, 170
 Catch you permitting it to die! You 've friends;
 There 's no withholding knowledge,—least from
 those

Apt to look elsewhere for their souls' supply:
 Why should not you parade your lawful prize?
 Who finds a picture, digs a medal up, 175

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Hits on a first edition,—he henceforth
Gives it his name, grows notable : how much more,
Who ferrets out a "medium" ? "David 's yours,
"You highly-favoured man ? Then, pity souls
"Less privileged ! Allow us share your luck !" 180
So, David holds the circle, rules the roast,
Narrates the vision, peeps in the glass ball,
Sets-to the spirit-writing, hears the raps,
As the case may be.

Now mark ! To be precise—
Though I say, "lies" all these, at this first stage, 185
'T is just for science' sake : I call such grubs
By the name of what they 'll turn to, dragonflies.
Strictly, it 's what good people style untruth ;
But yet, so far, not quite the full-grown thing :
It 's fancying, fable-making, nonsense-work— 190
What never meant to be so very bad—
The knack of story-telling, brightening up
Each dull old bit of fact that drops its shine.
One does see somewhat when one shuts one's eyes,
If only spots and streaks ; tables do tip 195
In the oddest way of themselves : and pens, good
Lord,
Who knows if you drive them or they drive you ?
'T is but a foot in the water and out again ;
Not that duck-under which decides your dive.
Note this, for it 's important : listen why. 200
I 'll prove, you push on David till he dives
And ends the shivering. Here 's your circle, now :
Two-thirds of them, with heads like you their host,
Turn up their eyes, and cry, as you expect,
"Lord, who 'd have thought it !" But there 's
always one

Looks wise, compassionately smiles, submits
"Of your veracity no kind of doubt,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

“ But—do you feel so certain of that boy’s ?

“ Really, I wonder ! I confess myself

“ More chary of my faith ! ” That ’s galling, sir ! 210

What, he the investigator, he the sage,

When all ’s done ? Then, you just have shut your
eyes,

Opened your mouth, and gulped down David
whole,

You ! Terrible were such catastrophe !

So, evidence is redoubled, doubled again, 215

And doubled besides ; once more, “ He heard, we
heard,

“ You and they heard, your mother and your wife,

“ Your children and the stranger in your gates :

“ Did they or did they not ? ” So much for him,

The black sheep, guest without the wedding-garb, 220

The doubting Thomas ! Now ’s your turn to crow :

“ He ’s kind to think you such a fool : Sludge
cheats ?

“ Leave you alone to take precautions ! ”

Straight

The rest join chorus. Thomas stands abashed,

Sips silent some such beverage as this, 225

Considers if it be harder, shutting eyes

And gulping David in good fellowship,

Than going elsewhere, getting, in exchange,

With no egg-nogg to lubricate the food,

Some just as tough a morsel. Over the way, 230

Holds Captain Sparks his court : is it better there ?

Have not you hunting-stories, scalping-scenes,

And Mexican War exploits to swallow plump

If you ’d be free o’ the stove-side, rocking-chair,

And trio of affable daughters ?

Doubt succumbs ! 235

Victory ! All your circle ’s yours again !

Out of the clubbing of submissive wits,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

David's performance rounds, each chink gets
patched,

Every protrusion of a point 's filed fine,
All 's fit to set a-rolling round the world, 240
And then return to David finally,
Lies seven-feet thick about his first half-inch.
Here 's a choice birth o' the supernatural,
Poor David 's pledged to ! You 've employed no
tool

That laws exclaim at, save the devil's own, 245
Yet screwed him into henceforth gulling you
To the top o' your bent,—all out of one half-lie !

You hold, if there 's one half or a hundredth part
Of a lie, that 's his fault,—his be the penalty !
I dare say ! You 'd prove firmer in his place ? 250
You 'd find the courage,—that first flurry over,
That mild bit of romancing-work at end,—
To interpose with " It gets serious, this ;
" Must stop here. Sir, I saw no ghost at all.
" Inform your friends I made . . . well, fools of
them, 255

" And found you ready-made. I 've lived in clover
" These three weeks : take it out in kicks of me ! "
I doubt it. Ask your conscience ! Let me know,
Twelve months hence, with how few embellish-
ments

You 've told almighty Boston of this passage 260
Of arms between us, your first taste o' the foil
From Sludge who could not fence, sir ! Sludge,
your boy !

I lied, sir,—there ! I got up from my gorge
On offal in the gutter, and preferred
Your canvas-backs : I took their carver's size, 265
Measured his modicum of intelligence,
Tickled him on the cockles of his heart

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

With a raven feather, and next week found myself
Sweet and clean, dining daintily, dized smart,
Set on a stool buttressed by ladies' knees, 270
Every soft smiler calling me her pet,
Encouraging my story to uncoil
And creep out from its hole, inch after inch,
"How last night, I no sooner snug in bed,
"Tucked up, just as they left me,—than came
raps ! 275
"While a light whisked" . . . "Shaped some-
what like a star?"
"Well, like some sort of stars, ma'am."—"So we
thought !
"And any voice ? Not yet ? Try hard, next time,
"If you can't hear a voice ; we think you may :
"At least, the Pennsylvanian 'mediums' did." 280
Oh, next time comes the voice ! "Just as we
hoped !"
Are not the hopers proud now, pleased, profuse
O' the natural acknowledgment ?

Of course !

So, off we push, illy-oh-yo, trim the boat,
On we sweep with a cataract ahead, 285
We 're midway to the Horseshoe : stop, who can,
The dance of bubbles gay about our prow !
Experiences become worth waiting for,
Spirits now speak up, tell their inmost mind,
And compliment the "medium" properly, 290
Concern themselves about his Sunday coat,
See rings on his hand with pleasure. Ask your-
self
How you 'd receive a course of treats like these !
Why, take the quietest hack and stall him up,
Cram him with corn a month, then out with him 295
Among his mates on a bright April morn,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

With the turf to tread ; see if you find or no
A caper in him, if he bucks or bolts !
Much more a youth whose fancies sprout as rank
As toadstool-clump from melon-bed. 'T is soon, 300
"Sirrah, you spirit, come, go, fetch and carry,
"Read, write, rap, rub-a-dub, and hang yourself!"
I 'm spared all further trouble ; all 's arranged ;
Your circle does my business ; I may rave
Like an epileptic dervish in the books, 305
Foam, fling myself flat, rend my clothes to shreds ;
No matter : lovers, friends and countrymen
Will lay down spiritual laws, read wrong things right
By the rule o' reverse. If Francis Verulam
Styles himself Bacon, spells the name beside 310
With a y and a k, says he drew breath in York,
Gave up the ghost in Wales when Cromwell
reigned,
(As, sir, we somewhat fear he was apt to say,
Before I found the useful book that knows)
Why, what harm 's done? The circle smiles apace, 315
"It was not Bacon, after all, you see !
"We understand ; the trick 's but natural :
"Such spirits' individuality
"Is hard to put in evidence : they incline
"To gibe and jeer, these undeveloped sorts. 320
"You see, their world 's much like a jail broke
loose,
"While this of ours remains shut, bolted, barred,
"With a single window to it. Sludge, our friend,
"Serves as this window, whether thin or thick,
"Or stained or stainless ; he 's the medium-pane 325
"Through which, to see us and be seen, they peep:
"They crowd each other, hustle for a chance,
"Tread on their neighbour's kibes, play tricks
enough !
"Does Bacon, tired of waiting, swerve aside ?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"Up in his place jumps Barnum—"I'm your man, 330
 "'I'll answer you for Bacon!' Try once more!"

Or else it 's—"What 's a 'medium'? He 's a
 means,

"Good, bad, indifferent, still the only means

"Spirits can speak by; he may misconceive,

"Stutter and stammer,—he 's their Sludge and
 drudge, 335

"Take him or leave him; they must hold their
 peace,

"Or else, put up with having knowledge strained

"To half-expression through his ignorance.

"Suppose, the spirit Beethoven wants to shed

"New music he 's brimful of; why, he turns 340

"The handle of this organ, grinds with Sludge,

"And what he poured in at the mouth o' the mill

"As a Thirty-third Sonata, (fancy now!)

"Comes from the hopper as bran-new Sludge,
 nought else,

"The Shakers' Hymn in G, with a natural F, 345

"Or the 'Stars and Stripes' set to consecutive
 fourths."

Sir, where 's the scrape you did not help me
 through,

You that are wise? And for the fools, the folk

Who came to see,—the guests, (observe that
 word!)

Pray do you find guests criticize your wine, 350

Your furniture, your grammar, or your nose?

Then, why your "medium"? What 's the differ-
 ence?

Prove your madeira red-ink and gamboge,—

Your Sludge, a cheat—then, somebody 's a goose

For vaunting both as genuine. "Guests!" Don't
 fear! 355

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

They 'll make a wry face, nor too much of that,
And leave you in your glory.

"No, sometimes
"They doubt and say as much!" Ay, doubt
they do!

And what 's the consequence? "Of course they
doubt"—

(You triumph) "that explains the hitch at once!" 360

"Doubt posed our 'medium,' puddled his pure
mind;

"He gave them back their rubbish: pitch chaff in,

"Could flour come out o' the honest mill?"

So, prompt

Applaud the faithful: cases flock in point,

"How, when a mocker willed a 'medium' once 365

"Should name a spirit James whose name was
George,

" 'James' cried the 'medium,'—'t was the test
of truth!"

In short, a hit proves much, a miss proves more.

Does this convince? The better: does it fail?

Time for the double-shotted broadside, then— 370

The grand means, last resource. Look black and
big!

"You style us idiots, therefore—why stop short?

"Accomplices in rascality: this we hear

"In our own house, from our invited guest

"Found brave enough to outrage a poor boy 375

"Exposed by our good faith! Have you been
heard?

"Now, then, hear us; one man 's not quite
worth twelve.

"You see a cheat? Here 's some twelve see an
ass:

"Excuse me if I calculate: good day!"

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Out slinks the sceptic, all the laughs explode. 380
Sludge waves his hat in triumph !

Or—he don't.
There 's something in real truth (explain who can!)
One casts a wistful eye at, like the horse
Who mopes beneath stuffed hay-racks and won't
munch

Because he spies a corn-bag : hang that truth, 385
It spoils all dainties proffered in its place !

I 've felt at times when, cockered, cosseted
And coddled by the aforesaid company,
Bidden enjoy their bullying,—never fear,
But o'er their shoulders spit at the flying man,— 390

I 've felt a child ; only, a fractious child ,
That, dandled soft by nurse, aunt, grandmother,
Who keep him from the kennel, sun and wind,
Good fun and wholesome mud,—enjoined be
sweet,

And comely and superior,—eyes askance 395
The ragged sons o' the gutter at their game,
Fain would be down with them i' the thick o' the
filth,

Making dirt-pies, laughing free, speaking plain,
And calling granny the grey old cat she is.
I 've felt a spite, I say, at you, at them, 400
Huggings and humbug—gnashed myteeth to mark
A decent dog pass ! It 's too bad, I say,
Ruining a soul so !

But what 's “ so,” what 's fixed,
Where may one stop? Nowhere! The cheating 's
nursed

Out of the lying, softly and surely spun 405
To just your length, sir ! I 'd stop soon enough :
But you 're for progress. “ All old, nothing new?
“ Only the usual talking through the mouth,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

"Or writing by the hand? I own, I thought
"This would develop, grow demonstrable, 410
"Make doubt absurd, give figures we might see,
"Flowers we might touch. There 's no one
doubts you, Sludge!
"You dream the dreams, you see the spiritual
sights,
"The speeches come in your head, beyond dispute.
"Still, for the sceptics' sake, to stop all mouths, 415
"We want some outward manifestation!—well,
"The Pennsylvanians gained such; why not
Sludge?
"He may improve with time!"

Ay, that he may!

He sees his lot: there 's no avoiding fate.

'T is a trifle at first. "Eh, David? Did you hear? 420

"You jogged the table, your foot caused the squeak,

"This time you 're . . . joking, are you not, my
boy?"

"N-n-no!"—and I 'm done for, bought and sold
henceforth.

The old good easy jog-trot way, the . . . eh?

The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes, 425

The spinning out and drawing fine, you know,—

Really mere novel-writing of a sort,

Acting, or improvising, make-believe,

Surely not downright cheater, —any how,

'T is done with and my lot cast; Cheat 's my name: 430

The fatal dash of brandy in your tea

Has settled what you 'll have the souchong's smack:

The caddy gives way to the dram-bottle.

Then, it 's so cruel easy! Oh, those tricks

That can't be tricks, those feats by sleight of hand, 435

Clearly no common conjuror's!—no indeed!

A conjuror? Choose me any craft i' the world

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

A man puts hand to ; and with six months' pains
I 'll play you twenty tricks miraculous
To people untaught the trade : have you seen glass
blown,

440

Pipes pierced ? Why, just this biscuit that I chip,
Did you ever watch a baker toss one flat
To the oven ? Try and do it ! Take my word,
Practise but half as much, while limbs are lithe,
To turn, shove, tilt a table, crack your joints,
Manage your feet, dispose your hands aright,
Work wires that twitch the curtains, play the glove
At end o' your slipper,—then put out the lights
And . . . there, there, all you want you 'll get,
I hope !

445

I found it slip, easy as an old shoe.

450

Now, lights on table again ! I 've done my part,
You take my place while I give thanks and rest.
“ Well, Judge Humgruffin, what 's your verdict,
sir ?

“ You, hardest head in the United States,—

“ Did you detect a cheat here ? Wait ! Let 's see !

455

“ Just an experiment first, for candour's sake !

“ I 'll try and cheat you, Judge ! The table tilts :

“ Is it I that move it ? Write ! I 'll press your
hand :

“ Cry when I push, or guide your pencil, Judge ! ”

Sludge still triumphant ! “ That a rap, indeed ?

460

“ That, the real writing ? Very like a whale !

“ Then, if, sir, you—a most distinguished man,

“ And, were the Judge not here, I 'd say, . . . no
matter !

“ Well, sir, if you fail, you can't take us in,—

“ There 's little fear that Sludge will ! ”

Won't he, ma'am ?

465

But what if our distinguished host, like Sludge,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Bade God bear witness that he played no trick,
While you believed that what produced the raps
Was just a certain child who died, you know,
And whose last breath you thought your lips had
felt?

470

Eh? That 's a capital point, ma'am: Sludge begins
At your entreaty with your dearest dead,
The little voice set lisping once again,
The tiny hand made feel for yours once more,
The poor lost image brought back, plain as dreams, 475
Which image, if a word had chanced recall,
The customary cloud would cross your eyes,
Your heart return the old tick, pay its pang!
A right mood for investigation, this!

One 's at one's ease with Saul and Jonathan, 480
Pompey and Cæsar: but one's own lost child . . .
I wonder, when you heard the first clod drop
From the spadeful at the grave-side, felt you free
To investigate who twitched your funeral scarf
Or brushed your flounces? Then, it came of course 485
You should be stunned and stupid; then, (how
else?)

Your breath stopped with your blood, your brain
struck work.

But now, such causes fail of such effects,
All 's changed,—the little voice begins afresh,
Yet you, calm, consequent, can test and try 490
And touch the truth. "Tests? Didn't the crea-
ture tell

"Its nurse's name, and say it lived six years,
"And rode a rocking-horse? Enough of tests!
"Sludge never could learn that!"

He could not, eh?
You compliment him. "Could not?" Speak for
yourself!

495

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

I 'd like to know the man I ever saw
Once,—never mind where, how, why, when,—
 once saw,
Of whom I do not keep some matter in mind
He 'd swear I “could not” know, sagacious soul !
What ? Do you live in this world's blow of blacks, 500
Palaver, gossipry, a single hour
Nor find one smut has settled on your nose,
Of a smut's worth, no more, no less ?—one fact
Out of the drift of facts, whereby you learn
What someone was, somewhere, somewhen, some-
 why ? 505
You don't tell folk—“ See what has stuck to me !
“ Judge Humgruffin, our most distinguished man,
“ Your uncle was a tailor, and your wife
“ Thought to have married Miggs, missed him,
 hit you ! ”—
Do you, sir, though you see him twice a-week ? 510
“ No,” you reply, “ what use retailing it ?
“ Why should I ? ” But, you see, one day you
 should,
Because one day there 's much use,—when this
 fact
Brings you the Judge upon both gouty knees
Before the supernatural ; proves that Sludge 515
Knows, as you say, a thing he “could not” know :
Will not Sludge thenceforth keep an outstretched
 face
The way the wind drives ?

“ Could not ! ” Look you now,
I 'll tell you a story ! There 's a whiskered chap,
A foreigner, that teaches music here 520
And gets his bread,—knowing no better way :
He says, the fellow who informed of him
And made him fly his country and fall West

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Was a hunchback cobbler, sat, stitched soles and
sang,
In some outlandish place, the city Rome, 525
In a cellar by their Broadway, all day long ;
Never asked questions, stopped to listen or look,
Nor lifted nose from lapstone ; let the world
Roll round his three-legged stool, and news run in
The ears he hardly seemed to keep pricked up. 530
Well, that man went on Sundays, touched his
pay,
And took his praise from government, you see ;
For something like two dollars every week,
He 'd engage tell you some one little thing
Of some one man, which led to many more, 535
(Because one truth leads right to the world's end)
And make you that man's master—when he dined
And on what dish, where walked to keep his health
And to what street. His trade was, throwing thus
His sense out, like an ant-eater's long tongue, 540
Soft, innocent, warm, moist, impassible,
And when 't was crusted o'er with creatures—slick,
Their juice enriched his palate. "Could not
Sludge !"

I 'll go yet a step further, and maintain,
Once the imposture plunged its proper depth 545
I ' the rotten of your natures, all of you,—
(If one 's not mad nor drunk, and hardly then)
It 's impossible to cheat—that 's, be found out !
Go tell your brotherhood this first slip of mine,
All to-day's tale, how you detected Sludge, 550
Behaved unpleasantly, till he was fain confess,
And so has come to grief ! You 'll find, I think,
Why Sludge still snaps his fingers in your face.
There now, you 've told them ! What's their
prompt reply ?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"Sir, did that youth confess he had cheated me, 555
"I'd disbelieve him. He may cheat at times ;
"That's in the 'medium'-nature, thus they're
made,
"Vain and vindictive, cowards, prone to scratch.
"And so all cats are ; still, a cat's the beast
"You coax the strange electric sparks from out, 560
"By rubbing back its fur ; not so a dog,
"Nor lion, nor lamb : 't is the cat's nature, sir !
"Why not the dog's ? Ask God, who made them
beasts !
"D'ye think the sound, the nicely-balanced man
"(Like me"—aside)—"like you yourself,"— 565
(aloud)
"—He's stuff to make a 'medium' ? Bless your
soul,
" 'T is these hysteric, hybrid half-and-halves,
"Equivocal, worthless vermin yield the fire !
"We take such as we find them, 'ware their tricks,
"Wanting their service. Sir, Sludge took in 570
you—
"How, I can't say, not being there to watch :
"He was tried, was tempted by your easiness,—
"He did not take in me !"

Thank you for Sludge !
I'm to be grateful to such patrons, eh,
When what you hear's my best word ? 'T is a
challenge 575
"Snap at all strangers, half-tamed prairie-dog,
"So you cower duly at your keeper's beck !
"Cat, show what claws were made for, muffling
them
"Only to me ! Cheat others if you can,
"Me, if you dare !" And, my wise sir, I dared— 580
Did cheat you first, made you cheat others next,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

And had the help o' your vaunted manliness
To bully the incredulous. You used me?
Have not I used you, taken full revenge,
Persuaded folk they knew not their own name, 585
And straight they 'd own the error! Who was
the fool

When, to an awe-struck wide-eyed open-mouthed
Circle of sages, Sludge would introduce
Milton composing baby-rhymes, and Locke
Reasoning in gibberish, Homer writing Greek 590
In noughts and crosses, Asaph setting psalms
To crotchet and quaver? I've made a spirit squeak
In sham voice for a minute, then outbroke
Bold in my own, defying the imbeciles—
Have copied some ghost's pothooks, half a page, 595
Then ended with my own scrawl undisguised.
"All right! The ghost was merely using Sludge,
"Suiting itself from his imperfect stock!"

Don't talk of gratitude to me! For what?
For being treated as a showman's ape, 600
Encouraged to be wicked and make sport,
Fret or sulk, grin or whimper, any mood
So long as the ape be in it and no man—
Because a nut pays every mood alike.
Curse your superior, superintending sort, 605
Who, since you hate smoke, send up boys that
climb

To cure your chimney, bid a "medium" lie
To sweep you truth down! Curse your women
too,

Your insolent wives and daughters, that fire up
Or faint away if a male hand squeeze theirs, 610
Yet, to encourage Sludge, may play with Sludge
As only a "medium," only the kind of thing
They must humour, fondle . . . oh, to misconceive
Were too preposterous! But I've paid them out!

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

They've had their wish—called for the naked truth, 615
And in she tripped, sat down and bade them stare:
They had to blush a little and forgive !

“ The fact is, children talk so ; in next world

“ All our conventions are reversed,—perhaps

“ Made light of : something like old prints, my
dear ! 620

“ The Judge has one, he brought from Italy,

“ A metropolis in the background,—o'er a bridge,

“ A team of trotting roadsters,—cheerful groups

“ Of wayside travellers, peasants at their work,

“ And, full in front, quite unconcerned, why not ? 625

“ Three nymphs conversing with a cavalier,

“ And never a rag among them : ‘ fine,’ folk cry—

“ And heavenly manners seem not much unlike !

“ Let Sludge go on ; we 'll fancy it 's in print ! ”

If such as came for wool, sir, went home shorn, 630

Where is the wrong I did them ? 'T was their
choice ;

They tried the adventure, ran the risk, tossed up

And lost, as some one 's sure to do in games ;

They fancied I was made to lose,—smoked glass

Useful to spy the sun through, spare their eyes : 635

And had I proved a red-hot iron plate

They thought to pierce, and, for their pains, grew
blind,

Whose were the fault but theirs ? While, as
things go,

Their loss amounts to gain, the more 's the shame !

They 've had their peep into the spirit-world, 640

And all this world may know it ! They 've fed fat

Their self-conceit which else had starved : what
chance

Save this, of cackling o'er a golden egg

And compassing distinction from the flock,

Friends of a feather ? Well, they paid for it, 645

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

And not prodigiously ; the price o' the play,
Not counting certain pleasant interludes,
Was scarce a vulgar play's worth. When you buy
The actor's talent, do you dare propose
For his soul beside ? Whereas my soul you buy ! 650
Sludge acts Macbeth, obliged to be Macbeth,
Or you 'll not hear his first word ! Just go through
That slight formality, swear himself 's the Thane,
And thenceforth he may strut and fret his hour,
Spout, spawl, or spin his target, no one cares ! 655
Why hadn't I leave to play tricks, Sludge as Sludge ?
Enough of it all ! I 've wiped out scores with you—
Vented your fustian, let myself be streaked
Like tom-fool with your ochre and carmine,
Worn patchwork your respectable fingers sewed 660
To metamorphose somebody,—yes, I 've earned
My wages, swallowed down my bread of shame,
And shake the crumbs off—where but in your face ?

As for religion—why, I served it, sir !
I 'll stick to that ! With my *phenomena* 665
I laid the atheist sprawling on his back,
Propped up Saint Paul, or, at least, Swedenborg !
In fact, it 's just the proper way to baulk
These troublesome fellows—liars, one and all,
Are not these sceptics ? Well, to baffle them, 670
No use in being squeamish : lie yourself !
Erect your buttress just as wide o' the line,
Your side, as they build up the wall on theirs ;
Where both meet, midway in a point, is truth
High overhead : so, take your room, pile bricks, 675
Lie ! Oh, there 's titillation in all shame !
What snow may lose in white, snow gains in rose !
Miss Stokes turns—Rahab,—nor a bad exchange !
Glory be on her, for the good she wrought,
Breeding belief anew 'neath ribs of death, 680

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Browbeating now the unabashed before,
 Ridding us of their whole life's gathered straws
 By a live coal from the altar ! Why, of old,
 Great men spent years and years in writing books
 To prove we 've souls, and hardly proved it then : 685
 Miss Stokes with her live coal, for you and me !
 Surely, to this good issue, all was fair—
 Not only fondling Sludge, but, even suppose
 He let escape some spice of knavery,—well,
 In wisely being blind to it ! Don't you praise 690
 Nelson for setting spy-glass to blind eye
 And saying . . . what was it—that he could not see
 The signal he was bothered with ? Ay, indeed !

I 'll go beyond : there 's a real love of a lie,
 Liars find ready-made for lies they make, 695
 As hand for glove, or tongue for sugar-plum.
 At best, 't is never pure and full belief ;
 Those furthest in the quagmire,—don't suppose
 They strayed there with no warning, got no chance
 Of a filth-speck in their face, which they clenched
 teeth, 700
 Bent brow against ! Be sure they had their doubts,
 And fears, and fairest challenges to try
 The floor o' the seeming solid sand ! But no !
 Their faith was pledged, acquaintance too apprised,
 All but the last step ventured, kerchiefs waved, 705
 And Sludge called " pet " : 't was easier march-
 ing on
 To the promised land join those who, Thursday next,
 Meant to meet Shakespeare ; better follow Sludge—
 Prudent, oh sure !—on the alert, how else ?—
 But making for the mid-bog, all the same ! 710
 To hear your outcries, one would think I caught
 Miss Stokes by the scruff o' the neck, and pitched
 her flat,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Foolish-face-foremost ! Hear these simpletons,
That 's all I beg, before my work 's begun,
Before I 've touched them with my finger-tip ! 715
Thus they await me (do but listen, now !
It 's reasoning, this is,—I can't imitate
The baby voice, though) " In so many tales
" Must be some truth, truth though a pin-point big,
" Yet, some : a single man 's deceived, perhaps— 720
" Hardly, a thousand : to suppose one cheat
" Can gull all these, were more miraculous far
" Than aught we should confess a miracle "—
And so on. Then the Judge sums up—(it 's rare)
Bids you respect the authorities that leap 725
To the judgment-seat at once,—why don't you note
The limpid nature, the unblemished life,
The spotless honour, indisputable sense
Of the first upstart with his story ? What—
Outrage a boy on whom you ne'er till now 730
Set eyes, because he finds raps trouble him ?
Fools, these are : ay, and how of their opposites
Who never did, at bottom of their hearts,
Believe for a moment ?—Men emasculate,
Blank of belief, who played, as eunuchs use, 735
With superstition safely,—cold of blood,
Who saw what made for them i' the mystery,
Took their occasion, and supported Sludge
—As proselytes ? No, thank you, far too shrewd !
—But promisers of fair play, encouragers 740
O' the claimant ; who in candour needs must hoist
Sludge up on Mars' Hill, get speech out of Sludge
To carry off, criticize, and cant about !
Didn't Athens treat Saint Paul so ?—at any rate,
It 's " a new thing " philosophy fumbles at. 745
Then there 's the other picker-out of pearl
From dung-heaps,—ay, your literary man,
Who draws on his kid gloves to deal with Sludge

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Daintily and discreetly,—shakes a dust
O'the doctrine, flavours thence, he well knows how, 750
The narrative or the novel,—half-believes,
All for the book's sake, and the public's stare,
And the cash that 's God's sole solid in this world!
Look at him! Try to be too bold, too gross
For the master! Not you! He's the man for muck; 755
Shovel it forth, full-splash, he'll smooth your brown
Into artistic richness, never fear!
Find him the crude stuff; when you recognize
Your lie again, you 'll doff your hat to it,
Dressed out for company! "For company," 760
I say, since there 's the relish of success:
Let all pay due respect, call the lie truth,
Save the soft silent smirking gentleman
Who ushered in the stranger: you must sigh
"How melancholy, he, the only one 765
"Fails to perceive the bearing of the truth
"Himself gave birth to!"—There 's the triumph's
smack!
That man would choose to see the whole world roll
I' the slime o' the slough, so he might touch the tip
Of his brush with what I call the best of browns— 770
Tint ghost-tales, spirit-stories, past the power
Of the outworn umber and bistre!

Yet I think
There 's a more hateful form of foolery—
The social sage's, Solomon of saloons
And philosophic diner-out, the fribble 775
Who wants a doctrine for a chopping-block
To try the edge of his faculty upon,
Prove how much common sense he 'll hack and hew
I' the critical minute 'twixt the soup and fish!
These were my patrons: these, and the like of them 780
Who, rising in my soul now, sicken it,—

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

These I have injured ! Gratitude to these ?
The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute
To the greenhorn and the bully—friends of hers,
From the wag that wants the queer jokes for his club, 785
To the snuff-box-decorator, honest man,
Who just was at his wits' end where to find
So genial a Pasiphae ! All and each
Pay, compliment, protect from the police :
And how she hates them for their pains, like me ! 790
So much for my remorse at thanklessness
Toward a deserving public !

But, for God ?

Ay, that 's a question ! Well, sir, since you press—
(How you do tease the whole thing out of me !
I don't mean you, you know, when I say " them " : 795
Hate you, indeed ! But that Miss Stokes, that
Judge !
Enough, enough—with sugar : thank you, sir !)
Now for it, then ! Will you believe me, though ?
You 've heard what I confess ; I don't unsay
A single word : I cheated when I could, 800
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,
And all the rest ; believe that : believe this,
By the same token, though it seem to set 805
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I 've knocked down ; I can't help that
It 's truth ! I somehow vomit truth to-day.
This trade of mine—I don't know, can't be sure
But there was something in it, tricks and all ! 810
Really, I want to light up my own mind.
They were tricks,—true, but what I mean to add
Is also true. First,—don't it strike you, sir ?
Go back to the beginning,—the first fact

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

We 're taught is, there 's a world beside this world, 815
With spirits, not mankind, for tenantry ;
That much within that world once sojourned here,
That all upon this world will visit there,
And therefore that we, bodily here below,
Must have exactly such an interest 820
In learning what may be the ways o' the world
Above us, as the disembodied folk
Have (by all analogic likelihood)
In watching how things go in the old home
With us, their sons, successors, and what not. 825
Oh yes, with added powers probably,
Fit for the novel state,—old loves grown pure,
Old interests understood aright,—they watch !
Eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to help,
Proportionate to advancement : they 're ahead, 830
That 's all—do what we do, but noblier done—
Use plate, whereas we eat our meals off delf,
(To use a figure).

Concede that, and I ask
Next what may be the mode of intercourse
Between us men here, and those once-men there ? 835
First comes the Bible's speech ; then, history
With the supernatural element,—you know—
All that we sucked in with our mothers' milk,
Grew up with, got inside of us at last,
Till it 's found bone of bone and flesh of flesh. 840
See now, we start with the miraculous,
And know it used to be, at all events :
What 's the first step we take, and can't but take,
In arguing from the known to the obscure ?
Why this : "What was before, may be to-day. 845
"Since Samuel's ghost appeared to Saul, of course
"My brother's spirit may appear to me."
Go tell your teacher that ! What 's his reply ?

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

What brings a shade of doubt for the first time
O'er his brow late so luminous with faith ? 850
"Such things have been," says he, "and there 's
no doubt
"Such things may be : but I advise mistrust
"Of eyes, ears, stomach, and, more than all, your
brain,
"Unless it be of your great-grandmother,
"Whenever they propose a ghost to you !" 855
The end is, there 's a composition struck ;
'T is settled, we 've some way of intercourse
Just as in Saul's time ; only, different :
How, when and where, precisely,—find it out !
I want to know, then, what 's so natural 860
As that *a person born into this world
And seized on by such teaching, should begin
With firm expectancy and a frank look-out
For his own allotment, his especial share
I' the secret,—his particular ghost, in fine ? 865
I mean, a person born to look that way,
Since natures differ : take the painter-sort.
One man lives fifty years in ignorance
Whether grass be green or red,—"No kind of eye
"For colour," say you ; while another picks 870
And puts away even pebbles, when a child,
Because of bluish spots and pinky veins—
"Give him forthwith a paint-box !" Just the same
Was I born . . . "medium," you won't let me
say,—
Well, seer of the supernatural 875
Everywhen, anyhow and everywhere,—
Will that do ?

I and all such boys of course
Started with the same stock of Bible-truth ;
Only,—what in the rest you style their sense,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Instinct, blind reasoning but imperative, 880
This, betimes, taught them the old world had one
law

And ours another: "New world, new laws," cried
they :

"None but old laws, seen everywhere at work,"
Cried I, and by their help explained my life
The Jews' way, still a working way to me. 885

Ghosts made the noises, fairies waved the lights,
Or Santa Claus slid down on New Year's Eve
And stuffed with cakes the stocking at my bed,
Changed the worn shoes, rubbed clean the figured
slate

O' the sum that came to grief the day before. 890

This could not last long : soon enough I found
Who had worked wonders thus, and to what end:
But did I find all easy, like my mates?
Henceforth no supernatural any more?

Not a whit : what projects the billiard-balls? 895

"A cue," you answer : "Yes, a cue," said I ;
"But what hand, off the cushion, moved the cue?"

"What unseen agency, outside the world,
"Prompted its puppets to do this and that,
"Put cakes and shoes and slates into their mind, 900
"These mothers and aunts, nay even school-
masters?"

Thus high I sprang, and there have settled since.
Just so I reason, in sober earnest still,
About the greater godsend, what you call
The serious gains and losses of my life. 905

What do I know or care about your world
Which either is or seems to be? This snap
O' my fingers, sir! My care is for myself;
Myself am whole and sole reality
Inside a raree-show and a market-mob 910

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Gathered about it : that 's the use of things.
'T is easy saying they serve vast purposes,
Advantage their grand selves : be it true or false,
Each thing may have two uses. What 's a star ?
A world, or a world's sun : doesn't it serve 915
As taper also, time-piece, weather-glass,
And almanac ? Are stars not set for signs
When we should shear our sheep, sow corn,
prune trees ?
The Bible says so.

Well, I add one use
To all the acknowledged uses, and declare 920
If I spy Charles's Wain at twelve to-night,
It warns me, "Go, nor lose another day,
"And have your hair cut, Sludge !" You laugh :
and why ?
Were such a sign too hard for God to give ?
No : but Sludge seems too little for such grace : 925
Thank you, sir ! So you think, so does not Sludge !
When you and good men gape at Providence,
Go into history and bid us mark
Not merely powder-plots prevented, crowns
Kept on kings' heads by miracle enough, 930
But private mercies—oh, you 've told me, sir,
Of such interpositions ! How yourself
Once, missing on a memorable day
Your handkerchief—just setting out, you know,—
You must return to fetch it, lost the train, 935
And saved your precious self from what befell
The thirty-three whom Providence forgot.
You tell, and ask me what I think of this ?
Well, sir, I think then, since you needs must know,
What matter had you and Boston city to boot 940
Sailed skyward, like burnt onion-peelings ? Much
To you, no doubt : for me—undoubtedly

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

The cutting of my hair concerns me more,
Because, however sad the truth may seem,
Sludge is of all-importance to himself. 945
You set apart that day in every year
For special thanksgiving, were a heathen else :
Well, I who cannot boast the like escape,
Suppose I said " I don't thank Providence
" For my part, owing it no gratitude " ? 950
" Nay, but you owe as much "—you'd tutor me,
" You, every man alive, for blessings gained
" In every hour o' the day, could you but know !
" I saw my crowning mercy : all have such,
" Could they but see ! " Well, sir, why don't they
see ? 955
" Because they won't look,—or perhaps, they
can't."

Then, sir, suppose I can, and will, and do
Look, microscopically as is right,
Into each hour with its infinitude
Of influences at work to profit Sludge ? 960
For that 's the case : I 've sharpened up my sight
To spy a providence in the fire's going out,
The kettle's boiling, the dime's sticking fast
Despite the hole i' the pocket. Call such facts
Fancies, too petty a work for Providence, 965
And those same thanks which you exact from me
Prove too prodigious payment : thanks for what,
If nothing guards and guides us little men ?
No, no, sir ! You must put away your pride,
Resolve to let Sludge into partnership ! 970
I live by signs and omens : looked at the roof
Where the pigeons settle—" If the further bird,
" The white, takes wing first, I'll confess when
thrashed ;
" Not, if the blue does "—so I said to myself
Last week, lest you should take me by surprise : 975

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Off flapped the white,—and I 'm confessing, sir !
Perhaps 't is Providence's whim and way

With only me, i' the world : how can you tell ?

" Because unlikely ! " Was it likelier, now,
That this our one out of all worlds beside, 980

The what-d'you-call-'em millions, should be just

Precisely chosen to make Adam for,

And the rest o' the tale ? Yet the tale 's true, you
know :

Such undeserving clod was graced so once ;

Why not graced likewise undeserving Sludge ? 985

Are we merit-mongers, flaunt we filthy rags ?

All you can bring against my privilege

Is, that another way was taken with you,—

Which I don't question. It 's pure grace, my luck :

I 'm broken to the way of nods and winks, 990

And need no formal summoning. You 've a help ;

Holloa his name or whistle, clap your hands,

Stamp with your foot or pull the bell : all 's one,

He understands you want him, here he comes.

Just so, I come at the knocking : you, sir, wait 995

The tongue o' the bell, nor stir before you catch

Reason's clear tingle, nature's clapper brisk,

Or that traditional peal was wont to cheer

Your mother's face turned heavenward : short of
these

There 's no authentic intimation, eh ? 1000

Well, when you hear, you 'll answer them, start up

And stride into the presence, top of toe,

And there find Sludge beforehand, Sludge that
sprang

At noise o' the knuckle on the partition-wall !

I think myself the more religious man.

Religion 's all or nothing ; it 's no mere smile 1005

O' contentment, sigh of aspiration, sir—

No quality o' the finelier-tempered clay

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Like its whiteness or its lightness ; rather, stuff
 O' the very stuff, life of life, and self of self. 1010
 I tell you, men won't notice ; when they do,
 They 'll understand. I notice nothing else :
 I 'm eyes, ears, mouth of me, one gaze and gape,
 Nothing eludes me, everything 's a hint,
 Handle and help. It 's all absurd, and yet 1015
 There 's something in it all, I know : how much ?
 No answer ! What does that prove ? Man 's still
 man,
 Still meant for a poor blundering piece of work
 When all 's done ; but, if somewhat 's done, like
 this,
 Or not done, is the case the same ? Suppose 1020
 I blunder in my guess at the true sense '
 O' the knuckle-summons, nine times out of ten,—
 What if the tenth guess happen to be right ?
 If the tenth shovel-load of powdered quartz
 Yield me the nugget ? I gather, crush, sift all, 1025
 Pass o'er the failure, pounce on the success.
 To give you a notion, now—(let who wins, laugh!)
 When first I see a man, what do I first ?
 Why, count the letters which make up his name,
 And as their number chances, even or odd, 1030
 Arrive at my conclusion, trim my course :
 Hiram H. Horsefall is your honoured name,
 And haven't I found a patron, sir, in you ?
 "Shall I cheat this stranger?" I take apple-pips,
 Stick one in either canthus of my eye, 1035
 And if the left drops first—(your left, sir, stuck)
 I 'm warned, I let the trick alone this time.
 You, sir, who smile, superior to such trash,
 You judge of character by other rules :
 Don't your rules sometimes fail you ? Pray, what
 rule 1040
 Have you judged Sludge by hitherto ?

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Oh, be sure,
You, everybody blunders, just as I,
In simpler things than these by far ! For see :
I knew two farmers,—one, a wiseacre
Who studied seasons, rummaged almanacs, 1045
Quoted the dew-point, registered the frost,
And then declared, for outcome of his pains,
Next summer must be dampish : 't was a drought.
His neighbour prophesied such drought would
fall,
Saved hay and corn, made cent. per cent. thereby, 1050
And proved a sage indeed : how came his lore ?
Because one brindled heifer, late in March,
Stiffened her tail of evenings, and somehow
He got into his head that drought was meant !
I don't expect all men can do as much : 1055
Such kissing goes by favour. You must take
A certain turn of mind for this,—a twist
I' the flesh, as well. Be lazily alive,
Open-mouthed, like my friend the ant-eater,
Letting all nature's loosely-guarded motes 1060
Settle and, slick, be swallowed ! Think yourself
The one i' the world, the one for whom the
world
Was made, expect it tickling at your mouth !
Then will the swarm of busy buzzing flies,
Clouds of coincidence, break egg-shell, thrive, 1065
Breed, multiply, and bring you food enough.

I can't pretend to mind your smiling, sir !
Oh, what you mean is this ! Such intimate way,
Close converse, frank exchange of offices,
Strict sympathy of the immeasurably great 1070
With the infinitely small, betokened here
By a course of signs and omens, raps and sparks,—
How does it suit the dread traditional text

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

O' the "Great and Terrible Name"? Shall the
 Heaven of Heavens
 Stoop to such child's play?

Please, sir, go with me 1075

A moment, and I 'll try to answer you.
 The "*Magnum et terribile*" (is that right?)
 Well, folk began with this in the early day;
 And all the acts they recognized in proof
 Were thunders, lightnings, earthquakes, whirl-
 winds, dealt

1080

Indisputably on men whose death they caused.
 There, and there only, folk saw Providence
 At work,—and seeing it, 't was right enough
 All headsshould tremble, handswringhands amain,
 And knees knock hard together at the breath 1085
 O' the Name's first letter; why, the Jews, I'm told,
 Won't write it down, no, to this very hour,
 Nor speak aloud: you know best if 't be so.
 Each ague-fit of fear at end, they crept
 (Because somehow people once born must live) 1090
 Out of the sound, sight, swing and sway o' the
 Name,

Into a corner, the dark rest of the world,
 And safe space where as yet no fear had reached;
 'T was there they looked about them, breathed
 again,

And felt indeed at home, as we might say. 1095
 The current o' common things, the daily life,
 This had their due contempt; no Name pursued
 Man from the mountain-top where fires abide,
 To his particular mouse-hole at its foot
 Where he ate, drank, digested, lived in short: 1100
 Such was man's vulgar business, far too small
 To be worth thunder: "small," folk kept on,
 "small,"

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

With much complacency in those great days !
A mote of sand, you know, a blade of grass—
What was so despicable as mere grass, 1105
Except perhaps the life o' the worm or fly
Which fed there ? These were "small" and men
were great.

Well, sir, the old way 's altered somewhat since,
And the world wears another aspect now :
Somebody turns our spyglass round, or else 1110
Puts a new lens in it : grass, worm, fly grow big :
We find great things are made of little things,
And little things go lessening till at last
Comes God behind them. Talk of mountains
now ?

We talk of mould that heaps the mountain, mites 1115
That throng the mould, and God that makes the
mites.

The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,
The simplest of creations, just a sac
That 's mouth, heart, legs and belly at once, yet
lives

And feels, and could do neither, we conclude, 1120
If simplified still further one degree :

The small becomes the dreadful and immense !
Lightning, forsooth ? No word more upon that !
A tin-foil bottle, a strip of greasy silk,
With a bit of wire and knob of brass, and there 's 1125
Your dollar's-worth of lightning ! But the cyst—
The life of the least of the little things ?

No, no !

Preachers and teachers try another tack,
Come near the truth this time : they put aside
Thunder and lightning : "That 's mistake," they
cry, 1130
"Thunderbolts fall for neither fright nor sport,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

"But do appreciable good, like tides,
"Changes o' the wind, and other natural facts—
" 'Good' meaning good to man, his body or soul.
" Mediate, immediate, all things minister 1135
"To man,—that 's settled : be our future text
" 'We are His children !' " So, they now
harangue
About the intention, the contrivance, all
That keeps up an incessant play of love,—
See the Bridgewater book.

Amen to it ! 1140

Well, sir, I put this question : I 'm a child ?
I lose no time, but take you at your word :
How shall I act a child's part properly ?
Your sainted mother, sir,—used you to live
With such a thought as this a-worrying you ? 1145
" She has it in her power to throttle me,
" Or stab or poison : she may turn me out,
" Or lock me in,—nor stop at this to-day,
" But cut me off to-morrow from the estate
" I look for "—(long may you enjoy it, sir !) 1150
" In brief, she may unchild the child I am."
You never had such crotchets ? Nor have I !
Who, frank confessing childship from the first,
Cannot both fear and take my ease at once,
So, don't fear,—know what might be, well enough, 1155
But know too, child-like, that it will not be,
At least in my case, mine, the son and heir
O' the kingdom, as yourself proclaim my style.
But do you fancy I stop short at this ?
Wonder if suit and service, son and heir 1160
Needs must expect, I dare pretend to find ?
If, looking for signs proper to such an one,
I straight perceive them irresistible ?
Concede that homage is a son's plain right,

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

And, never mind the nods and raps and winks, 1165
'T is the pure obvious supernatural
Steps forward, does its duty : why, of course !
I have presentiments ; my dreams come true :
I fancy a friend stands whistling all in white
Blithe as a boblink, and he 's dead I learn. 1170
I take dislike to a dog my favourite long,
And sell him ; he goes mad next week and snaps.
I guess that stranger will turn up to-day
I have not seen these three years ; there 's his knock
I wager "sixty peaches on that tree !" — 1175
That I pick up a dollar in my walk,
That your wife's brother's cousin's name was
George—

And win on all points. Oh, you wince at this ?
You 'd fain distinguish between gift and gift,
Washington's oracle and Sludge's itch 1180
O' the elbow when at whist he ought to trump ?
With Sludge it 's too absurd ? *Fine, draw the line*
Somewhere, but, sir, your somewhere is not mine !

Bless us, I 'm turning poet ! It 's time to end.
How you have drawn me out, sir ! All I ask 1185
Is—am I heir or not heir ? If I 'm he,
Then, sir, remember, that same personage
(To judge by what we read i' the newspaper)
Requires, beside one nobleman in gold
To carry up and down his coronet, 1190
Another servant, probably a duké,
To hold egg-nogg in readiness : why want
Attendance, sir, when helps in his father's house
Abound, I 'd like to know ?

Enough of talk !
'My fault is that I tell too plain a truth. 1195
Why, which of those who say they disbelieve,
Your clever people, but has dreamed his dream,

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Caught his coincidence, stumbled on his fact
He can't explain, (he 'll tell you smilingly)
Which he 's too much of a philosopher 1200
To count as supernatural, indeed,
So calls a puzzle and problem, proud of it :
Bidding you still be on your guard, you know,
Because one fact don't make a system stand,
Nor prove this an occasional escape 1205
Of spirit beneath the matter : that 's the way !
Just so wild Indians picked up, piece by piece,
The fact in California, the fine gold
That underlay the gravel—hoarded these,
But never made a system stand, nor dug ! 1210
So wise men hold out in each hollowed palm
A handful of experience, sparkling fact.
They can't explain ; and since their rest of life
Is all explainable, what proof in this ?
Whereas I take the fact, the grain of gold, 1215
And fling away the dirty rest of life,
And add this grain to the grain each fool has found
O' the million other such philosophers,—
Till I see gold, all gold and only gold,
Truth questionless though unexplainable, 1220
And the miraculous proved the commonplace !
The other fools believed in mud, no doubt—
Failed to know gold they saw : was that so strange?
Are all men born to play Bach's fiddle-fugues,
"Time" with the foil in carte, jump their own
height, 1225
Cut the mutton with the broadsword, skate a five,
Make the red hazard with the cue, clip nails
While swimming, in five minutes row a mile,
Pull themselves three feet up with the left arm,
Do sums of fifty figures in their head, 1230
And so on, by the scores of instances ?
The Sludge with luck, who sees the spiritual facts

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

His fellows strive and fail to see, may rank
With these, and share the advantage.

Ay, but share
The drawback ! Think it over by yourself ; 1235
I have not heart, sir, and the fire 's gone grey.
Defect somewhere compensates for success,
Everyone knows that. Oh, we 're equals, sir !
The big-legged fellow has a little arm
And a less brain, though big legs win the race : 1240
Do you suppose I 'scape the common lot ?
Say, I was born with flesh so sensitive,
Soul so alert, that, practice helping both,
I guess what 's going on outside the veil,
Just as a prisoned crane feels pairing-time 1245
In the islands where his kind are, so must fall
To capering by himself some shiny night,
As if your back-yard were a plot of spice—
Thus am I 'ware o' the spirit-world : while you,
Blind as a beetle that way,—for amends, 1250
Why, you can double fist and floor me, sir !
Ride that hot hardmouthed horrid horse of yours,
Laugh while it lightens, play with the great dog,
Speak your mind though it vex some friend to hear,
Never brag, never bluster, never blush,— 1255
In short, you 've pluck, when I 'm a coward—there !
I know it, I can't help it,—folly or no,
I 'm paralyzed, my hand 's no more a hand,
Nor my head a head, in danger : you can smile
And change the pipe in your cheek. Your gift 's
not mine. 1260
Would you swap for mine ? No ! but you 'd add
my gift
To yours : I dare say ! I too sigh at times,
Wish I were stouter, could tell truth nor flinch,
Kept cool when threatened, did not mind so much

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Being dressed gaily, making strangers stare, 1265
 Eating nice things ; when I 'd amuse myself,
 I shut my eyes and fancy in my brain
 I 'm—now the President, now Jenny Lind,
 Now Emerson, now the Benicia Boy—
 With all the civilized world a-wondering 1270
 And worshipping. I know it 's folly and worse ;
 I feel such tricks sap, honeycomb the soul,
 But I can't cure myself : despond, despair,
 And then, hey, presto, there 's a turn o' the wheel,
 Under comes uppermost, fate makes full amends ; 1275
 Sludge knows and sees and hears a hundred things
 You all are blind to,—I 've my taste of truth,
 Likewise my touch of falsehood,—vice no doubt,
 But you 've your vices also : I 'm content.

What, sir ? You won't shake hands ? “ Because
 I cheat ! ” 1280
 “ You 've found me out in cheating ! ” That 's
 enough

To make an apostle swear ! Why, when I cheat,
Mean to cheat, do cheat, and am caught in the act,
Are you, or, rather, am I sure o' the fact ?
 (There 's verse again, but I 'm inspired somehow.) 1285
 Well then I 'm not sure ! I may be, perhaps,
 Free as a babe from cheating : how it began,
 My gift,—no matter ; what 't is got to be
 In the end now, that 's the question ; answer that !
 Had I seen, perhaps, what hand was holding mine, 1290
 Leading me whither, I had died of fright :
 So, I was made believe I led myself.
 If I should lay a six-inch plank from roof
 To roof, you would not cross the street, one step,
 Even at your mother's summons : but, being
 shrewd, 1295

If I paste paper on each side the plank

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

And swear 't is solid pavement, why, you 'll cross
Humming a tune the while, in ignorance
Beacon Street stretches a hundred feet below :
I walked thus, took the paper-cheat for stone. 1300
Some impulse made me set a thing o' the move
Which, started once, ran really by itself ;
Beer flows thus, suck the siphon ; toss the kite,
It takes the wind and floats of its own force.
Don't let truth's lump rot stagnant for the lack 1305
Of a timely helpful lie to leaven it !
Put a chalk-egg beneath the clucking hen,
She 'll lay a real one, laudably deceived,
Daily for weeks to come. I 've told my lie,
And seen truth follow, marvels none of mine ; 1310
All was not cheating, sir, I 'm positive !
I don't know if I move your hand sometimes
When the spontaneous writing spreads so far,
If my knee lifts the table all that height,
Why the inkstand don't fall off the desk a-tilt, 1315
Why the accordion plays a prettier waltz
Than I can pick out on the piano-forte,
Why I speak so much more than I intend,
Describe so many things I never saw.
I tell you, sir, in one sense, I believe 1320
Nothing at all,—that everybody can,
Will, and does cheat : but in another sense
I 'm ready to believe my very self—
That every cheat 's inspired, and every lie
Quick with a germ of truth.

You ask perhaps 1325

Why I should condescend to trick at all
If I know a way without it? This is why!
There 's a strange secret sweet self-sacrifice
In any desecration of one 's soul
To a worthy end,—isn't it Herodotus 1330

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

(I wish I could read Latin !) who describes
The single gift o' the land's virginity,
Demanded in those old Egyptian rites,
(I've but a hazy notion—help me, sir !)
For one purpose in the world, one day in a life, 1335
One hour in a day—thereafter, purity,
And a veil thrown o'er the past for evermore !
Well, now, they understood a many things
Down by Nile city, or wherever it was !
I've always vowed, after the minute's lie, 1340
And the end's gain,—truth should be mine hence-
forth.
This goes to the root o' the matter, sir,—this plain
Plump fact : accept it and unlock with it
The wards of many a puzzle !

Or, finally,
Why should I set so fine a gloss on things ? 1345
What need I care ? I cheat in self-defence,
And there 's my answer to a world of cheats !
Cheat ? To be sure, sir ! What 's the world worth
else ?
Who takes it as he finds, and thanks his stars ?
Don't it want trimming, turning, furbishing up 1350
And polishing over ? Your so-styled great men,
Do they accept one truth as truth is found,
Or try their skill at tinkering ? What 's your
world ?
Here are you born, who are, I 'll say at once,
Of the luckiest kind, whether in head and heart, 1355
Body and soul, or all that helps them both.
Well, now, look back : what faculty of yours
Came to its full, had ample justice done
By growing when rain fell, biding its time,
Solidifying growth when earth was dead, 1360
Spiring up, broadening wide, in seasons due ?

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

Never! You shot up and frost nipped you off,
Settled to sleep when sunshine bade you sprout;
One faculty thwarted its fellow: at the end,
All you boast is "I had proved a topping tree" 1365
"In other climes"—yet this was the right clime
Had you foreknown the seasons. Young, you've
force

Wasted like well-streams: old,—oh, then indeed,
Behold a labyrinth of hydraulic pipes
Through which you'd play off wondrous waterwork;
Only, no water 's left to feed their play. 1370

Young,—you've a hope, an aim, a love: it 's tossed
And crossed and lost: you struggle on, some spark
Shut in your heart against the puffs around,
Through cold and pain; these in due time subside,
Now then for age's triumph, the hoarded light 1375

You mean to loose on the altered face of things,—
Up with it on the tripod! It 's extinct.
Spend your life's remnant asking, which was best,
Light smothered up that never peeped forth once,
Or the cold cresset with full leave to shine? 1380

Well, accept this too,—seek the fruit of it
Not in enjoyment, proved a dream on earth,
But knowledge, useful for a second chance,
Another life,—you've lost this world—you've
gained

Its knowledge for the next. What knowledge, sir, 1385
Except that you know nothing? Nay, you doubt
Whether 't were better have made you man or
brute,

If aught be true, if good and evil clash.
No foul, no fair, no inside, no outside,
There 's your world! 1390

Give it me! I slap it brisk
With harlequin's pasteboard sceptre: what's it now?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Changed like a rock-flat, rough with rusty weed,
At first wash-over o' the returning wave !
All the dry dead impracticable stuff
Starts into life and light again ; this world 1395
Pervaded by the influx from the next.

I cheat, and what 's the happy consequence ?
You find full justice straightway dealt you out,
Each want supplied, each ignorance set at ease,
Each folly fooled. No life-long labour now 1400
As the price of worse than nothing! No mere
film

Holding you chained in iron, as it seems,
Against the outstretch of your very arms
And legs i' the sunshine moralists forbid ! 1405
What would you have ? Just speak and, there,
you see !

You 're supplemented, made a whole at last,
Bacon advises, Shakespeare writes you songs,
And Mary Queen of Scots embraces you.
Thus it goes on, not quite like life perhaps, 1410
But so near, that the very difference piques,
Shows that e'en better than this best will be—
This passing entertainment in a hut
Whose bare walls take your taste since, one stage
more,

And you arrive at the palace : all half real, 1415
And you, to suit it, less than real beside,
In a dream, lethargic kind of death in life,
That helps the interchange of natures, flesh
Transfused by souls, and such souls ! Oh, 't is
choice !

And if at whiles the bubble, blown too thin, 1420
Seem nigh on bursting,—if you nearly see
The real world through the false,—what *do* you
see ?

Is the old so ruined ? You find you 're in a flock

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

O' the youthful, earnest, passionate—genius,
beauty,
Rank and wealth also, if you care for these : 1425
And all depose their natural rights, hail you,
(That 's me, sir) as their mate and yoke-fellow,
Participate in Sludgehood—nay, grow mine,
I veritably possess them—banish doubt,
And reticence and modesty alike ! 1430
Why, here 's the Golden Age, old Paradise
Or new Eutopia ! Here 's true life indeed,
And the world well won now, mine for the first
time !

And all this might be, may be, and with good help
Of a little lying shall be : so, Sludge lies ! 1435
Why, he's at worst your poet who sings how Greeks
That never were, in Troy which never was,
Did this or the other impossible great thing !
He 's Lowell—it 's a world (you smile applause),
Of his own invention—wondrous Longfellow, 1440
Surprising Hawthorne ! Sludge does more than
they,

And acts the books they write : the more his praise!

But why do I mount to poets? Take plain prose—
Dealers in common sense, set these at work,
What can they do without their helpful lies ? 1445
Each states the law and fact and face o' the thing
Just as he 'd have them, finds what he thinks fit,
Is blind to what missuits him, just records
What makes his case out, quite ignores the rest.
It 's a History of the World, the Lizard Age, 1450
The Early Indians, the Old Country War,
Jerome Napoleon, whatsoever you please,
All as the author wants it. Such a scribe
You pay and praise for putting life in stones,
Fire into fog, making the past your world. 1455

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

There 's plenty of "How did you contrive to grasp
"The thread which led you through this labyrinth?
"How build such solid fabric out of air?
"How on so slight foundation found this tale,
"Biography, narrative?" or, in other words, 1460
"How many lies did it require to make
"The portly truth you here present us with?"
"Oh," quoth the penman, purring at your praise,
"T is fancy all; no particle of fact:
"I was poor and threadbare when I wrote that
book 1465
" 'Bliss in the Golden City.' I, at Thebes?
"We writers paint out of our heads, you see!"
"—Ah, the more wonderful the gift in you,
"The more creativeness and godlike craft!"
But I, do I present you with my piece, 1470
It's "What, Sludge? When my sainted mother
spoke
"The verses Lady Jane Grey last composed
"About the rosy bower in the seventh heaven
"Where she and Queen Elizabeth keep house,—
"You made the raps? 'T was your invention that? 1475
"Cur, slave and devil!"—eight fingers and two
thumbs
Stuck in my throat!

Well, if the marks seem gone,
'T is because stiffish cock-tail, taken in time,
Is better for a bruise than arnica.
There, sir! I bear no malice: 't isn't in me. 1480
I know I acted wrongly: still, I've tried
What I could say in my excuse,—to show
The devil's not all devil . . . I don't pretend,
He's angel, much less such a gentleman
As you, sir! And I've lost you, lost myself, 1485
Lost all-l-l-l- . . .

MR. SLUDGE, "THE MEDIUM"

No—are you in earnest, sir?
O yours, sir, is an angel's part! I know
What prejudice prompts, and what 's the common
course

Men take to soothe their ruffled self-conceit:
Only you rise superior to it all! 1490

No, sir, it don't hurt much; it 's speaking long
That makes me choke a little: the marks will go!
What? Twenty V-notes more, and outfit too,
And not a word to Greeley? One—one kiss
O' the hand that saves me! You 'll not let me
speak, 1495

I well know, and I 've lost the right, too true!
But I must say, sir, if She hears (she does)
Your sainted . . . Well, sir,—be it so! That 's,
I think,
My bed-room candle. Good-night! Bl-l-less you,
sir!

R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly
scamp! 1500

I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering! Oh what, you 're the
man?

You're satisfied at last? You've found out Sludge?
We 'll see that presently: my turn, sir, next!
I too can tell my story: brute,—do you hear?— 1505
You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag,
In just such a fit of passion: no, it was . . .
To get this house of hers, and many a note
Like these . . . I 'll pocket them, however . . .
five,

Ten, fifteen . . . ay, you gave her throat the twist, 1510
Or else you poisoned her! Confound the cuss!
Where was my head? I ought to have prophesied
He 'll die in a year and join her: that 's the way.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

I don't know where my head is : what had I done ?
How did it all go ? I said he poisoned her, 1515
And hoped he 'd have grace given him to repent,
Whereon he picked this quarrel, bullied me
And called me cheat: I thrashed him,—who could
help ?
He howled for mercy, prayed me on his knees
To cut and run and save him from disgrace : 1520
I do so, and once off, he slanders me.
An end of him ! Begin elsewhere anew !
Boston 's a hole, the herring-pond is wide,
V-notes are something, liberty still more.
Beside, is he the only fool in the world ? 1525

APPARENT FAILURE

" We shall soon lose a celebrated building "

Paris Newspaper

I

No, for I 'll save it ! Seven years since,
I passed through Paris, stopped a day
To see the baptism of your Prince ;
Saw, made my bow, and went my way :
Walking the heat and headache off,
I took the Seine-side, you surmise,
Thought of the Congress, Gortschakoff,
Cavour's appeal and Buol's replies,
So sauntered till—what met my eyes ?

II

Only the Doric little Morgue !
The dead-house where you show your drowned :
Petrarch's Vaucluse makes proud the Sorgue,
Your Morgue has made the Seine renowned.
One pays one's debt in such a case ;
I plucked up heart and entered,—stalked,
Keeping a tolerable face
Compared with some whose cheeks were
chalked :
Let them ! No Briton 's to be baulked !

III

First came the silent gazers ; next,
A screen of glass, we 're thankful for ;
Last, the sight's self, the sermon's text,
The three men who did most abhor

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Their life in Paris yesterday,
So killed themselves : and now, enthroned
Each on his copper couch, they lay
Fronting me, waiting to be owned.
I thought, and think, their sin 's atoned.

IV

Poor men, God made, and all for that !
The reverence struck me ; o'er each head
Religiously was hung its hat,
Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,
Sacred from touch : each had his berth,
His bounds, his proper place of rest,
Who last night tenanted on earth
Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast,—
Unless the plain asphalte seemed best.

V

How did it happen, my poor boy ?
You wanted to be Buonaparte
And have the Tuileries for toy,
And could not, so it broke your heart ?
You, old one by his side, I judge,
Were, red as blood, a socialist,
A leveller ! Does the Empire grudge
You 've gained what no Republic missed ?
Be quiet, and unclench your fist !

VI

And this—why, he was red in vain,
Or black,—poor fellow that is blue !
What fancy was it turned your brain ?
Oh, women were the prize for you !

APPARENT FAILURE

Money gets women, cards and dice
Get money, and ill-luck gets just
The copper couch and one clear nice
Cool squirt of water o'er your bust,
The right thing to extinguish lust !

VII

It 's wiser being good than bad ;
It 's safer being meek than fierce :
It 's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;
That, after Last, returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched ;
That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

EPILOGUE

FIRST SPEAKER (*as David*)

I

ON the first of the Feast of Feasts,
The Dedication Day,
When the Levites joined the Priests
At the Altar in robed array,
Gave signal to sound and say,— 5

II

When the thousands, rear and van,
Swarming with one accord
Became as a single man
(Look, gesture, thought and word)
In praising and thanking the Lord,— 10

III

When the singers lift up their voice,
And the trumpets made endeavour,
Sounding, "In God rejoice!"
Saying, "In Him rejoice
"Whose mercy endureth for ever!"— 15

IV

Then the Temple filled with a cloud,
Even the House of the Lord;
Porch bent and pillar bowed:
For the presence of the Lord,
In the glory of His cloud, 20
Had filled the House of the Lord.

EPILOGUE

SECOND SPEAKER (*as Renan*)

Gone now ! All gone across the dark so far,
Sharpening fast, shuddering ever, shutting still,
Dwindling into the distance, dies that star
Which came, stood, opened once ! We gazed
our fill 25
With upturned faces on as real a Face
That, stooping from grave music and mild fire,
Took in our homage, made a visible place
Through many a depth of glory, gyre on gyre,
For the dim human tribute. Was this true ? 30
Could man indeed avail, mere praise of his,
To help by rapture God's own rapture too,
Thrill with a heart's red tinge that pure pale
bliss ?
Why did it end ? Who failed to beat the breast,
And shriek, and throw the arms protesting wide, 35
When a first shadow showed the star addressed
Itself to motion, and on either side
The rims contracted as the rays retired ;
The music, like a fountain's sickening pulse,
Subsided on itself ; awhile transpired 40
Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,
No prayers retard ; then even this was gone,
Lost in the night at last. We, lone and left
Silent through centuries, ever and anon
Venture to probe again the vault bereft 45
Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist
Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say—
And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,
But where may hide what came and loved our
clay ?
How shall the sage detect in yon expanse 50
The star which chose to stoop and stay for us ?

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Unroll the records ! Hailed ye such advance
Indeed, and did your hope evanish thus ?
Watchers of twilight, is the worst averred ?
We shall not look up, know ourselves are seen, 55
Speak, and be sure that we again are heard,
Acting or suffering, have the disk's serene
Reflect our life, absorb an earthly flame,
Nor doubt that, were mankind inert and
numb,
Its core had never crimsoned all the same, 60
Nor, missing ours, its music fallen dumb ?
Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,
Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals,
Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most
On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls ! 65

THIRD SPEAKER

I

Witless alike of will and way divine,
How heaven's high with earth's low should inter-
twine !
Friends, I have seen through your eyes : now use
mine !

II

Take the least man of all mankind, as I ;
Look at his head and heart, find how and why 70
He differs from his fellows utterly :

III

Then, like me, watch when nature by degrees
Grows alive round him, as in Arctic seas
(They said of old) the instinctive water flees

EPILOGUE

IV

Toward some elected point of central rock, 475
As though, for its sake only, roamed the flock •
Of waves about the waste : awhile they mock

V

With radiance caught for the occasion,—hues
Of blackest hell now, now such reds and blues
As only heaven could fitly interfuse,— 80

VI

The mimic monarch of the whirlpool, king
O' the current for a minute : then they wring
Up by the roots and oversweep the thing,

VII

And hasten off, to play again elsewhere
The same part, choose another peak as bare,
They find and flatter, feast and finish there.

VIII

When you see what I tell you,—nature dance
About each man of us, retire, advance,
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

IX

His worth, and—once the life, his product, 90
gained—
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,
And show thus real, a thing the North but
feigned—

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

X

When you acknowledge that one world could do
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,
Divide us, each from other, me from you,— 95

XI

Why, where 's the need of Temple, when the
walls
O' the world are that? What use of swells and
falls
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet-
calls?

XII

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose, 100
Become my universe that feels and knows.

END OF VOL. IV.